

SUN AND SHADE.

A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"BEAUTIFUL EDITH," "URSULA'S LOVE STORY,"

ETC. ETC.

"Women fill up the intervals of conversation and of life."

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SUN AND SHADE.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HOME.

A happy rural seat of various view.—MILTON.

PETER DRAKE of Trederrick had had to take the name of Drake instead of that of Penwarne for a good estate, which made him, from a moderately affluent country Squire, rise to be a man of considerable wealth and corresponding importance in the west of England, where his family had lived for many generations.

He was glad that the estate which had come to him with his new name had on it a mansion of such a tumble-down sort, that by no possibility could he have lived in it. No other place but old Trederrick could ever have been a home to Peter Penwarne, who divested himself of his old name with a groan, and an inward desire, not to be fulfilled, that his son might take it back again.

"The Drakes are a very ancient family," he allowed, "but I would never have called myself by their name if I had not thought that their acres were a convenient appendage to the old estate here, specially as Caerhydden mine, which, I thank the Fates, is in their flower-garden, and likely to require the sinking of a shaft in the front hall—specially as the mine will be rich, and the house must be utterly destroyed. I shall send for the staircase for our new farm, and we can bring up everything else worth keeping, and build the things in somewhere or other."

Mr. Drake in his own fashion paid these contemplated acts of respect to the passed-away ancestors, and found his rent-roll trebled in value. Caerhydden mine did its duty in

obliterating the Drakes' old residence, and in greatly adding to the grandeur of Trederrick. But it did not suit the old man to make any great display of his new wealth. He grew quite deceitful about the spending of it. He did not keep a single additional horse in his stable; neither did he add one servant to the establishment. He kept no governess for Jane; nor, in short, did he ever do anything which malice, however clever, could have picked out as the thing which he could not have done but for the Drake riches.

Only when there were great public deeds of goodness to be helped on, then the Drake gold flowed. Where Squire Penwarne had given ten-pound notes he, being now a steward of that increasing property once the Drakes, gave hundreds.

When Peter was at Oxford no doubt his income was far larger than it would have been if he had been called Penwarne; and his father's "love gifts," with which his extraordinary successes in every examination were rewarded, were, in fact, unlimited; for orders on his banker, signed, but not filled in, would be sent as "a little compliment," and a few words, such as—"We have two thousand odd at the bank, and shall want about three hundred at home," conveyed the only hint as to the extent of the trusted Peter's powers.

Peter was thoroughly trustworthy. He had pursuits and fancies, but he was not extravagant. He had a scholar's tastes, and he gratified them without scruple; but his father would often laugh, with a droll congratulating ring in his merriment, to find Peter thanking him for the offer of so much, and taking, with grateful contentment, some very modest sum, because he had been buying books, or had picked up a good old picture which would look well at Trederrick.

When Peter came of age, every young man on the estate, which took in the whole parish, who had had the happiness of being born in the same year, had a gift of twenty pounds; and it was given to them by Jane, a little queen of beauty, of just ten years old. Poor child, all the villagers and tenantry loved her, for the sake of the gentle mother who had driven about among their homes, blessing and sweetening their lives with gifts and tender counsels.

Young and old, steady and unsteady, had some good memory of the Squire's dead wife; and they had never done with their sympathy. They sympathized with the old man in everything. They told the tale of his joys and

sorrows as if he had been one of themselves. They pointed out the three little graves where the boys lay who had come after the eldest son, and died in infancy. Young mothers still put flowers on the small green hillocks, and strong men read with deep voices and a sort of solemn satisfaction the record on the monument close by, which told how Lady Jane Penwarne, only daughter of the late Lord Dynham, had, after losing three sons in infancy, died, to the irreparable loss of her two children still surviving, and the inconsolable grief of her husband.

Still the children survived, and still was the husband inconsolable; and, the name of Drake notwithstanding, still did the honest folk of those parts sympathize with the Squire, regard him with pride, and pay him homage and obedience.

The Squire himself knew all that the people felt, and loved them accordingly. With what a gallant air he touched his hat to the farmers' wives, and what a smile and sweet-voiced welcome he had from their husbands. He had a royal memory, too. He never forgot a name; he remembered their tastes, and might have kept a register of their wishes, so true was his recollection on such matters, and so good and so ready was his advice. He was the best landlord, people said, that ever lived, but he knew what he was about, and would always have his shilling's worth for his shilling. "If you want a gift," he would say, "you may name it; but I never pay for a bad bargain." So it was generally agreed that he was a man whom it was a comfort to serve under, and that it was a pleasure to sell him a good thing.

Trederrick was not a large place, either in the extent of its grounds or the size of the house; but the house was a very beautiful one of its kind. It was of granite, showing many mullioned windows, a low tower, and an excellently designed entrance. It stood on a platform edged by a parapet wall, and the steep outside bank was clothed with flowering shrubs. Every year the same colours showed in the flower-beds that were arranged within the parapet, and no new plant had ever been introduced there. Mrs. Penwarne's choice had become a tradition, something sweet and sacred; a sort of charm dwelt about that part of old Trederrick; and there the good Squire took his evening walk by himself, making meditation in the still summer nights, often watched from the windows by the old family

servants, who whispered together that they knew of what their old master was thinking. "Ah, yes; the hour for their meeting again is nearer by a day than it was last night!" So no one ever doubted that he was inconsolable.

There were other things, too, that told of the Squire's faithful heart. There was a room upstairs in which no one had slept since *she* went to the sleep that knows no waking, till the great day dawns which shall never know an evening. Things remained in that room as she had left them. It was called "Mother's room," and little Jane had prattled boldly of it as a baby child, and had gone on loving it as she grew, and learned its history. Her father had often sat there and watched her at play, with her big brother playing with her. No melancholy seemed to the children to belong to the room, scarcely any restraint. Till Jane was ten years old no hands but her father's had touched the things on the dressing-table, which was rather gorgeously laid out with filigree gold and silver, rare glass, and a mirror veiled with ancient lace. On the mother's birthday, on their wedding-day, and on the day when Peter was born, the Squire always put a bunch of flowers in glass on the table; and it had been remarked that these anniversaries had never found the Squire from home, nor these observances omitted. But after Jane had reached her tenth birthday, he told her she should keep "Mother's days" in future; and when Peter came of age the child had entered upon this responsibility.

On that day the father had stood in that room with his children, and had spoken to them after his own fashion. "Peter," he had said, very gravely, "when you marry, my boy, may you find a soul like *hers* to bear you company! And, whether I am alive or dead when that hour comes, your wife must have this room. It may be changed for her and made smart, and as a lady's bower should be in these gay days; and then all that is in this room must be given to Jane. She will get a husband one day; and oh, my darling, be to him all that your mother was to me, with one only exception—never leave him." Then he kissed Jane, and putting his hand within Peter's arm, he led the way out of the room.

"Bring your wife home," he went on, "at your own time. Don't be afraid of your father. When so good an excuse is provided, we may prune the shrubs and cut away the trees on the back lawn. Your mother planted them, and I know

that they should be lopped and trimmed. I hope you may never know what it is to feel so foolish, my son."

In truth the shrubs were almost growing in at the windows of the library where Lady Jane Penwarne had usually spent her mornings, and the old gardener had often shaken his head most despairingly at their luxuriance. But then there was not a peculiarity about the Squire which the people around him did not respect. No one ever ventured to propose to cut back the flower-laden intruders. They had it all their own way, and seemed to rejoice in their liberty.

But the room was very dark, so the Squire used it but little; never, however, confessing the reason, but saying that he preferred the rooms that had a fuller view of the sea.

And what a view, and what a sea!

Trederrick was built on a platform that art and nature together had worked out on the ridge of a promontory. On the right, as you stood looking out towards the great ocean, was a deep and wide valley or glen, in which a village, scattered about with magnificent elms, nestled in the prettiest way possible. From the opposite side a stream rushed down through a cleft in the hill, and at the lowest point of the village, and just above the shingly sea-beach, it turned a flour-mill.

Where Trederrick stood the promontory was at its widest; and above and beyond it was a great table-land of heath-covered moor, part of which had been planted with a wide sheltering belt of pines and other evergreens. It made, as you looked at Trederrick from the sea, a sufficiently distant and grandly dark background for the grey old house.

The bay of the sea that ran up on the left was full a mile and a half from the house, and the intervening space was occupied by the wooded sides of more than one miniature valley and little, softly-rising, intersecting hill.

Winding among the ups and downs came the carriage-drive from the great road which led through that part of the county; and this drive, passing as it did by two small farms, a group of labourers' cottages, the upstanding sides of a long disused quarry, through hursts of wood, and by solitary majestic oaks, standing on spreading lawn-land, was thought the most beautiful thing of the kind in that part of the world. Every acre of ground, every stick and stone, every old granite cottage, the whirring mill-wheel, and each mountain stream, was dear to the heart of every Penwarne; for Penwarne in their hearts they were, though they had

Drake upon their visiting-cards and on the outsides of their letters.

Indeed, in spite of wills, and the sovereign's sign-manual giving permission to use the name and bear the arms of Drake, the good Squire answered to the name of Penwarne with most unaffected ease and simplicity, and certainly no earthly power could have induced him to use the arms of Drake on all occasions. "Not on the carriage," he had said; "I am too old for that. I should not know my own in the street."

As to the poor neighbours, they had not felt in any difficulty. There was a man among them whose surname was Davies; what his Christian name was very few knew, for he had a name by right of inheritance, which took precedence of any that he might have received in baptism. He was always called Chronicler Davies, and his family for several generations had been the local historians, keeping in their memories the record of events, great and small, any way interesting to the villagers of Trederrick or their neighbours.

The assertions and explanations made and given, from generation to generation, by the chroniclers Davies had become a sort of unwritten law in these parts. The first of the family who had earned the title had no doubt been specially gifted; and three causes—a natural taste, a curious connection with a certain member of the Penwarne family, and a marvellous memory, had made him the important person that a born antiquary and historian, even among the uneducated, is sure to become. So the Chronicler Davies existing in Mr. Drake's time spoke with authority, and he used to say of that gentleman:

"We call him Trederrick Penwarne; we have long called him Trederrick. It got to be a necessity, generations back, when there were three sons, of whom the eldest son and the youngest inherited Trederrick and Coombe; of the other my forefather kept the chronicle. *Then* there was Coombe Penwarne, and Trederrick Penwarne; and *now* there is Coombe Penwarne, and Trederrick Penwarne; and as was, so is, and ever shall be." To which the piously inclined would reverently add, "Amen;" feeling that no mere human custom and institution, such as the making of wills and the Herald's College, could ever really interfere with these obvious arrangements of Providence.

But the existence of Penwarne of Coombe provided the drop of bitterness that is always lurking in the cup of

human felicity. For not only did the younger branch bear the time-honoured appellation of Penwarne, but—*he was in the entail*. And this had greatly troubled Mr. Drake's heart, if not his conscience. So it happened that, on the night of the day when his only son Peter came of age, after the festivities were well over, and when the young heir was in bed and asleep, tired of making speeches of thanks and declarations as to the perfection of his hopes, and the integrity of his intentions—all of which he had done with extraordinary propriety—his father sat in the "Mother's room," where the fresh flowers from the blue vase shed living fragrance among the dead memories, and thought of Penwarne of Coombe.

"I ought to cut off the entail now," he said, softly; and then, with his eyes fixed on the soft carpet his wife's feet had pressed, he fell into a sort of reverie, when a few words spoken between himself and his cousin, the week before his own marriage, came back with scenery, sound, and atmosphere, like a vivid waking dream.

At the date on which his mind was fixed his cousin Richard Penwarne had met him one summer evening, when they were both on horseback in the lane by the flour-mill. Coombe stood near the summit of a craggy hill above Trederrick, and the cousins being neighbours, saw each other not unfrequently. I suppose they had gone on from one generation to another calling themselves cousins, but it would have required a reference to the pedigree, or the help of Chronicler Davies, to have told exactly what the relationship was. But whatever it was, they thought a great deal of it, for they stood alone, each the representative of his own branch, without brother or sister, father or mother, or any other Penwarne of full age, in the country except themselves.

Richard Penwarne was a year or two older than his cousin, and he had begun life earlier, having been left an orphan as a boy. On this evening of which the Squire was thinking, they had met gladly, and like brothers.

It was never agreeable to ride through the village, where the ascent was over stones, called in the language of the place *sconsing*, occasionally assisted in the ascent by a low step to which mules, donkeys, and the fishermen's ponies, had by long use been accustomed; so the two men had turned the horses into the Higherwell Road, and had ridden slowly between the honeysuckle-covered hedges, talking of

the weather and the crops. All at once, Peter Penwarne, our friend, who was destined to take another name, pulled up, and said.

"Cousin Richard! If I live, at the earliest moment I am going to do what I will not do without telling you, lest I should be accused of doing you an injury underhand."

"Impossible. What can you mean?"

"I shall cut off the entail."

"Entail! What entail?"

Then Peter explained at length how every acre of ground was entailed, and was answered by a laugh. "Of course you will cut off the entail. I should do it in your place. It would be ridiculous not to do it. I don't wonder at your determination, and I should never look with hungry eyes at Frederick. It is a highly respectable thing to have a cousin there, but in my eyes Coombe is paradise. And I really never heard of the entail," he went on; "and I am sure you will have half a dozen children. I could not wish you to be as I am, with only one boy to rest my heart on, with a yearning anxiety which makes him more pain than pleasure to me." After which speech there was a short silence, occupied by both gentlemen in thinking of that singularly beautiful small specimen of humanity, Master Arthur, who had been spoken of in so seemingly thankless a way.

But as to the bright curly-headed boy, being, as his father was in the frequent habit of saying, "more pain than pleasure," it is to be hoped that so great a falsehood belonged to the list of those untruths that grow less by repetition, becoming a formal statement more of what ought to be than of what actually is. The responsibility of such a beautiful motherless child *ought* to have been a pain, of course, to any well-regulated mind; and indeed, there were women of the sighing order who pitied Richard Penwarne exceedingly—or said they did. But, whether it was from the natural perversity and independence of the Penwarne character, or because Master Arthur had taken all the diseases of infancy with the perfection of a model child in a doctoring book, and was big and strong, as well as handsome, and had already proved himself to be possessed of both a head and a heart, one way or other it had fallen out that Richard Penwarne had never had anything but pleasure in his son from the moment he was born, which was seven years ago. And now he was to be cut out of the entail.

"I thought it right to say I should do it," said Peter, still labouring at some perfectly unnecessary explanation. "When a man is going to be married he thinks of these things."

"Of course," replied Richard; "and nine years ago I married. It only lasted two years," he said, "and I am not going to try it again. When is your wedding-day?"

"Some time next week."

"So soon. I wish you joy. I am going to get a gallop across the turf."

They had reached the high land at the top of the valley, where a vast uncultivated common lay before them. So they had parted, and the younger man, so soon to bring a wife to Trederrick, had watched Richard Penwarne cross the country on his fleet hunter, with mingled wonder and approval—"Wonder if he cared for his wife?—A splendid horseman!" Then he had turned into his own plantations, and had walked his horse quietly home. He had felt strong in his resolutions, but never, in all his life, did he ever do anything more about the entail.

He had married, and he had buried his wife; he had seen his eldest son become his only son, and reach his one-and-twentieth year; and as he sat in that cushioned chair meditating, he knew that he could cut off the entail if he pleased. But he thought of the curly-headed boy who had been left to his guardianship by the sudden death, on the very day of which he had been thinking, of that cousin Richard, twenty-three years back in the past, by the fall of his horse before reaching Coombe, and he had not the heart, just then, to do it.

The boy had become a man, and quite fulfilled the boy's promise. He was thirty years of age, in the army, and in India. Coombe was kept in the highest order for him, and his coming home anticipated as a blessing and a joy for future days.

"I wish he could have been here to-day," said the Squire in his heart. "I am always glad when I think of the love that the young men have for each other. Arthur took to Peter from his birth—but I must cut him out of this entail, though! Peter, after the hints I have given to him, will surely marry early. And *she* liked Arthur," he went on, recalling his wife's image as he rose up, and then stood for a moment surveying the room sacred to her recollection—the work-table, with her working implements upon it, and

the child's story-book she had just been reading to her son.—"Ah, yes; she liked him. But it would be best to manage entail and all when Peter marries." So he went away. And he never did anything as to the entail, though he lived for five years. He died, leaving Jane but scantily provided for, with her mother's fortune only, and Peter in great affluence, with large possessions in land, and a considerable sum of ready money.

He had never intended this disposition of his property. He had always meant Jane to have fifteen thousand pounds; and she had been brought up as a little queen in that stately old house, and was the very darling of her father's heart. She was victimized by a will made before she was born; and she only inherited her three thousand pounds by the mother's marriage settlement. All the country cried out and said it was cruel. Chronieler Davies had to adopt an apologetic tone, and say that there was "no accounting for *some* men's, even *good* men's, peculiarities; and he had gone by the name of Drake——"

But when Peter appeared on the scene—which was as soon as he could come back from Berlin, where he was staying,—he immediately assured his nearest friends, and his solicitor, that he should make up Jane's fortune to the sum his father had intended to give her, which turned the tide of public censure. "Of course Mr. Drake had known that he could depend on his son! Mr. Peter Drake was one of the most honourable of men! And so I believe he was. But he was obliged to go back to Berlin, and poor little Jane, who, though not quite fifteen, was a very womanly young girl, was left at Trederrick in a strange state; not troubled about her money—she was too young for that—but sad, almost frightened at the thought of the life that lay before her, and lamenting because "Peter could never understand."





CHAPTER II.

THE CURRENT OF EVENTS.

Flow on, thou shining river,
But ere thou reach the sea
Find Ella's bower, and give her
The wreath I fling on thee.—MOORE.

PETER DRAKE remained about a month at Trederrick after his father's funeral. He was what people called a remarkable man, and *people*, in more places than the far west, united in prophesying great things for him. Money, and land and county interest had descended to him, and these things had found him already possessed of considerable erudition. He had left a name behind him at Oxford, and he was esteemed by the learned wherever he was known. He had an instinct as to everything that was correct. He did the right thing in the smallest matters intuitively, people said, without seemingly any previous consideration. He was very good-looking, with a pedigree nose, a strong jaw, and a short upper lip. He could smile most benignant smiles, and listen—to a lady—to perfection. He often treated men with undisguised condescension, but he never conducted himself so to a woman. He was a great favourite therefore with the gentle sex, for whose pleasure he made clever observations, and uttered those charming drolleries which only the wise and learned can utter. He was only twenty-six years old, but every word he spoke was listened to; and to have Mr. Drake to talk to them was the dominant desire in every female breast wherever he was. The old were flattered by his attentions, the young were flustered by his distinction of them; silly girls were openly agitated when he took the chair by their sides, and well-read dames enjoyed his conversation thoroughly.

Happy Peter Drake—most happy, most considered, most

flattered of men! Why did the philosophic poor say that "young Squire seemed a bit above his-self 'pon times?"

He had a head full of learning, but these same judgers of men knew the size of Peter Drake's heart, and they described its dimensions in their own way—"no bigger than just enough to feel for himself," said the grey-headed men who had long "loved the family."

"And there's Miss Jane, she has got heart enough for him and herself too; and all the worse for her, if she has much to expect from him."

It was all terribly true. There stood Jane, at the most awkward age of a girl's life, wanting love; looking at her perfect brother for just that much of human weakness which would have made them by sympathy equals; yearning for five minutes of tears or smiles, but no such moments ever came.

He spoke great truths to her in the nearest language, and she felt instructed even in the midst of a torrent of tears; but she did not want him to be wise. "He can't feel for me now. He can't guess how my heart seems to be torn to shreds." And she could not tell him. It would have produced some perfect truth as to the tendency in the human mind to exaggeration; and Jane hated such perfection at that moment. Wisdom and truth were like a two-edged sword, and she was for ever being wounded. Sometimes, too, Jane's temper was tried; and once when Peter, standing up in all his calm beauty, reminded her, in the midst of a flood of tears which she was shedding, gathered up in the most ungraceful position on the sofa, that it was appointed unto all men once to die, she jumped up angrily and said that no doubt, if fathers could die more than once, daughters would learn to grow more accustomed to the event, and be easily reconciled, perhaps. She stood erect and looked at him. She had it in her heart to say, "For Heaven's sake, *feel*; feel something; abuse me; beat me with a stick if you will—but *feel*." But the words which she might have said were stopped, no doubt happily, by the cold, sarcastic gleam that passed across his face. He gave the slightest shrug with his shoulders, and he raised his eyebrows ever so little, and on his lips there was a surprised sort of smile. He was so superior to all a silly girl's fruitless broken-heartedness. She felt as one struck dumb and trembling with the suddenly revealed fact that Peter was pitying her—not with the pity she yearned after, but with the

condescension of a superior being towards a creature who couldn't be reasonable. She thought she would beg his pardon; she trembled, and grew pale; but there she stood erect and looking at him.

"Jane, how tall are you?" he said.

The words delighted her. She could have laughed in his face. The difference in their natures was so great that the thought of it endowed her with independence. It rushed down suddenly upon her like a gift. She was strong in a moment. The tears stood on her cheeks, and her eyes were stinging, but she answered steadily:

"I am five feet one and a half. I am tall for my age, but very slight, you see. You know I shall be fifteen next month."

"Ah! fifteen. Then I have six years of guardianship. There will be something to think about. Put on your bonnet; we will walk on the terrace."

"Think about—think about," repeated the girl in her heart. "I hope and pray I may never live in captivity to any thoughts of yours. How you would pick me to pieces, and put me together again, if you could!"

Then she dropped on her knees on a step of the great staircase, which she was ascending at full speed, and had one more great gush of grief, her young head on the step above her. But the door of the library opened, and she fled away to her room, bathed her eyes, and tied her thickest veil across her face, lest her brother should observe their red rims and her burning skin, and give her a lecture on the cuticle. He had a fever for improving her mind.

After a few turns on the terrace, during which he talked in his gentle voice and educated style, with a composure which was highly irritating to his sister's nerves and temper, he said, "And now that I have to go back to Berlin, I wonder what will be the best thing to do about you?"

"The best thing to do is to do nothing," said Jane promptly, the spirit of independence with which she had become suddenly gifted not deserting her in her emergency.

"Well," said her brother, feeling a little relieved, "nothing *at present*. Shall we say nothing at present, Jane?"

"Do nothing," repeated Jane. Then, almost overcome, but getting courage, somehow, not to speak too pleadingly,

she went on. "I could not bear any change—any *further* change, I mean, Brother."

She had been brought up as a little child to call him Brother; and the many years' difference in their age made her continue in the habit. "I know all you would say—please don't talk to me. I dare say I ought to have a governess or something. But you do not know how very much I have, young as I am, been mistress here. I have sat at the head of the table ever since I was thirteen—as a child, of course; but still I have done it. I could not bear to be suddenly treated as a baby."

"Dear child, don't exaggerate—a baby!"

"Well, you know what I mean, and that is enough for the present. I have read steadily—read with Miss Teague."

"Oh, Miss Teague! I had forgotten about her. Her staying here, as of course she will gladly do——"

"She won't stay if I don't," quickly interrupted Jane.

"Indeed. Have you talked it over?"

"No. I never thought of any change until now—till you suggested it to me. But I speak because I know Miss Teague's character. I don't think she would stay here as your servant."

"Why has she stayed so long, then?—why has she worked as my father's servant?"

"For love, I suppose," said Jane.

"She has had sixty pounds a year," said Peter; and the girl groaned to herself inwardly that nothing would ever make brother understand. So when he said that it might do for a year, Jane made no reply, and only said she was cold and wished to go in.

As soon as she got inside the house, she went through the hall and, by a red baize-covered door, into a part of the mansion specially under the government of Miss Teague. One quick little knock at an oak door announced her presence; and once inside that door, and in a small panelled sitting-room, almost covered with fine old prints in black and gold frames, she flung herself into the arms of a tall, sweetly-smiling, ladylike woman.

"Oh, Nanny! Nanny!" the girl cried, as she nestled inside the folding arms, and looked up into the dove's eyes that gazed down upon her with most marvellous sweetness—"Oh, Nanny! I wish I had done with life! It is so hard and horrible, and may be so terribly long."

But the lips that were pressed on hers stopped her re-

bellious speaking—"You are to be thankful for life, and glad to live, and strong to work, and willing to suffer. So dry your eyes, and take the white sugar out of the cupboard. See, I am blanching the almonds for biscuits; and you may weigh out the sugar for Martha to crush. Your brother gives two dinner-parties next week to our neighbours and friends, before he goes away."

Jane did exactly as she was bid; first taking from a drawer in a great oak secretaire a huge white linen apron, and wrapping herself and her black dress up in it in a very notable manner. Miss Teague made up the fire in a diminutive stove.

"Brother has some scheme in his head for my improvement. I do verily believe," said Jane, with her eyes wide open, and glaring wildly—"that he meant to send me to school!"

Miss Teague looked at her softly, steadily, and with consideration in her glance. "I had not thought of that," she said.

Her voice was a very musical voice, sweet and low; but there was great self-possession in her manner, and something *strong* in her way of speaking, which was neither quick nor slow, but with a sort of pleasant activity in it, which gave you the immediate impression of her being a person of lively perception and good common sense.

"You know it would kill me," said Jane. "I wonder how much power a guardian has."

"Whatever is best for you will do you good. You are not of a perverse disposition."

"It is best for me to stay here with you."

"For the present—yes; I think so."

"Brother is going to speak to you."

"Then I shall say so."

"Oh, here he comes!"

She heard his voice in the passage, and she tore off her apron in a fright—"Why?" said Miss Teague, with a tone of reproach. "Oh, you don't know. He can't understand." Upon which there was a knock at the door, and Miss Teague said, "Go, now." And Jane disappeared with the speed of a hunted hare by an opposite entrance.

Miss Teague was a remarkable person. She was by birth and education a gentlewoman; but her father, a military man, died too soon, as people said; he left a widow, a daughter, and a thousand pounds behind him. Lord and Lady Dynham had known Captain Teague very well; and

when their daughter, before Jane's birth, was found to be in feeble health, Lady Dynham had proposed that Miss Teague should come to her, and help to take care of her. Within six months the child was born and the mother was dead. Miss Teague had been invaluable, and in a modest but sensible way she showed that she knew her value. She offered to stay in the family as housekeeper, and to see after the proper management of the infant. The offer was accepted, and sixty pounds a year was fixed on as the money recompence for Miss Teague's services. She had her meals by herself in the panelled parlour to which the reader has been just introduced, except when Mr. Drake invited her ceremoniously to dinner or tea. She had for fifteen years kept house, and ruled the servants with the discreetest sway and in the wisest manner. Her accounts had won her the admiration of the steward and the praises of the family lawyer; and her attention to Jane, who was the darling of her heart, had been nothing less than perfect. Marian Teague was, indeed, a gifted woman. She had a warm heart, a steady, clear judgment, and a courageous manner of action. No vexation stirred her, no irritation moved her to anger. She held the reins of government with hands that never trembled, and she was at once incapable of favouritism and above the need of advice. She had made herself a servant of her own free will, and she had so led her life that no one called her a servant. The Squire's lady housekeeper was the description that the poor people had first invented, and that had been at once generally adopted. Miss Teague had raised her mother's income eighty pounds a year, keeping thirty for her own use; and Lord Dynham had given Mrs. Teague a pretty cottage, which stood in the grounds of Dynley Court, rent-free. The cottage was a little wonder of beauty and elegance; and fair ladies had tea there in Sevres china tea-cups, while Marian made almond biscuits by an old family receipt at Trederrick, and taught her darling how to weigh the sugar. It was all happiness and thanksgiving on both sides. Mrs. Teague felt rich and sufficiently blessed, and not the gold of Golconda could have tempted her daughter away from Jane.

So now Jane has rushed through that friendly door into the adjoining little room, quite lined with cupboards, and having another door leading into the kitchen premises, by which she could make her escape to the landing by a steep winding staircase of old, dangerously polished oak.

"Come in," said Miss Teague, and in walked Peter Drake.

They were very good friends, and had been friends for all the years of Miss Teague's occupation. "I am always very glad to see you here," she went on. "I think I talk more at my ease among my own surroundings than in the library in the midst of yours." So Peter sat down in an old three-cornered chair, which was a great deal more comfortable than it looked.

"I want to talk of Jane," he said, as Miss Teague took up her knitting and prepared to listen. "My time is so occupied, and I must see my neighbours here, at these two dinner parties—you wrote all the notes?"

"All, except to Major Penwarne and the others you named, whom you wished to write to yourself."

"Yes; exactly. Arthur was very good to get here for the funeral. Have you seen him?"

"Oh, yes; I saw him on the day of the funeral. He came up to me and asked if I was not Miss Teague. Five years ago, when you came of age, he tried to get home, but could not. But after he returned he visited you at Oxford, didn't he?"

"Yes. And then he was at Coombe for a time. I think I am just going to call there. I want to know how much he has been here. I feel so ignorant of these small details. I have not been at home, you know, since I took my degree. And Arthur may have been half-living here, for anything I know."

"No. He was here for about six months after your coming of age. He came back perhaps six months ago; was at Coombe for a day or two; called here in your father's illness, when I sent him a message that he could not see him. Then at the funeral he said he had come down from Scotland, and shortened his stay there on purpose. He said he should remain for a few months at Coombe; then he is going again to India."

"Thank you—admirable!" exclaimed Peter. "I am up to it all now."

"I think you should know that Coombe has been of late years a very favourite walk of mine and Jane's. And Jane often rode there with messages from your father, and notes to Mr. Wood the steward. Jane knows Coombe as well as Major Penwarne does, and every picture and curiosity in the house. It certainly has been a pleasure to wander

about the house; and Mrs. Marks keeps it so beautifully clean. I wish you would let Major Penwarne know of Jane's visits; telling the truth will deprive the fact of any appearance of vulgar prying, if it should ever come to his knowledge."

"Thank you," said Peter, greatly pleased; "very judicious, Miss Teague. But this brings us again to Jane. She is very unformed."

"I think only characterless people can be formed. Jane has a strong character, and very little training will make her what Heaven intends—an excellent woman."

"Indeed, I am delighted. But she is untaught—sadly untaught."

Miss Teague dropped her knitting in her lap, opened those dove's eyes very wide, and fixed them on the surprised Peter. Her whole face was written over with a puzzling query—"Do you mean to be impertinent?" The writing was so plain that Peter was startled, and said "I beg your pardon," in a very great hurry. Then Miss Teague took up her knitting again, and with great consideration went on with the stitches.

"In my judgment she ought to go to a thoroughly good school," said Peter, almost in a tone of vexation.

"You have seen so little of Jane that you are not able to form a judgment," she replied with great decision. "You have been absent for years; you come back to her at a most trying moment; you find her in sudden overwhelming grief. What can you know of Jane? And what can she know of you? You are so unlike your father." Somehow Miss Teague contrived to make the last assertion in a tone that conveyed it to Peter's ears as a compliment.

Yes, he was very unlike his father. His father had been the mere country gentleman. He had never learnt Greek, and had forgotten Latin. He had been one of the best of men; but then—— So Mr. Drake accepted the speech according to his interpretation, and smiled on Miss Teague till she smiled too. "Nevertheless," he said, for he was the most positive of men, "if only because I can't tell what else to do she must go to school. We will, if you please, consider that point settled. I know you write to my grandmother, Lady Dynham, sometimes. If you are writing soon it would be but a properly respectful compliment to tell her the determination I have come to, and perhaps she would like to point out some schools where girls of our class——"

"I will write to-night," said Miss Teague, interrupting Peter in the midst of his most fascinating smile—he always tried to look beautiful when he was insisting on having his own way, "and I can ask her to look out for some place for me. Of course I do not stay here after Jane goes."

This was a blow. Pounds, shillings, and pence were in the most perfect order at Trederrick, and so Peter wished them to stay. New ways, new ideas, new rules, were all abominations to him. He did not want to be troubled about the necessary grievances of life. "I did not contemplate such a change as that," he said.

"Peter!" exclaimed Miss Teague.

Calling him by his Christian name, as she had done formerly for many years, quite brought him back to his senses.

"You know very well that it would be beneath me to stay here after Jane is gone. Lady Dynham would tell you that it would not be right. I came here for your mother's sake more than fifteen years ago; I stayed on, at my own suggestion, for Jane's; but I should do myself a needless injury to stay as your servant. I am a great deal surprised, Mr. Drake."

"Pray forgive me," said Peter honestly. "People get selfish when contemplating a difficulty; I am in a difficulty. May I smooth it over for the present by asking you to continue your care of her, and—and—of me," he went on smiling, "for a year—at least for a year, Miss Teague?"

She had gained the point for which she had been fighting, for love of the girl she almost worshipped, but she showed no elation. She had already determined that, if Jane was sent to school, she would get herself a place in the same school if she could; but if she showed no elation to Peter, she was equally prudent to his sister, and only mentioned, in the most commonplace way, when Jane returned and seated herself, with great round eyes full of questions, in the three-cornered chair that Peter had vacated, that there was to be another year of companionship at dear Trederrick.

"Peter thinks me an ignorant goose," exclaimed Jane, after a great sigh of relief.

"No wonder," said Miss Teague.

"Nanny!" in a tone of horror.

"Yes; you are so strange to him."

"Because he never understands."

"He can understand steadiness of conduct and a lady-like behaviour."

"I have not done with running when I would rather walk, and I *must* jump over the flower-beds instead of pacing round by the paths, if I am in a hurry; and of course I am a gentlewoman."

"I think you should try to please Peter. Try at those dinner-parties."

"I said I couldn't dine with them. I said I couldn't, wouldn't, must not; because I was not old enough; because I am too tall for fifteen; because I did not know what to wear; because I could not behave like a young lady; because I should not know when to go away after dinner, or how to walk across the room by myself, and—because I should cry." And then Jane stopped her rapid incoherent speech, and dropped her excited young face into her hands, and cried as if her heart was breaking. On which Miss Teague kissed her, not with fondling, but just once; and she wiped her eyes and face with a wet towel, and told her to go on with the weighing of the sugar; then, after a few minutes, she began to sing.

She sang in a sweet pure style, "Flow on thou shining river," and after a few notes Jane joined in a full, true second; and so, while Peter was walking over heath and thymy down, those two sang some of the sorrow out of their hearts, and went on with the work of life. And after the interval of a few days came the first dinner-party.

Jane and Miss Teague were in the drawing-room when the dining-room was being deserted. Peter and some of his friends were walking on the terrace, and Jane was looking at them, standing back, and concealed by the great mullion of the window. She was making sundry comments on the people she saw. "If that most excellent Sir Hairy Goodman never spoke, and always looked at his shoes, I should really like him very much. Fox-hunters ought never to be loud, and staring, and addicted to compliments. They ought always to be gentle, and sensitive, able to write a pleasant song, and perhaps to sing it, but I am not sure of that. I know they should always love a garden, and be cultivators of roses and geraniums."

"Jane!" Miss Teague spoke, not to express discontent at those rather formed opinions for a damsel of fifteen, for she knew Jane to be more like the girl of seventeen or eighteen in mind, but to draw her attention to the sudden entrance of Major Penwarne, whom she had not seen for several years.

"My cousin!" he said, advancing to her with both hands extended, and giving Miss Teague a pleasant smile of recognition. "I was 'Cousin Arthur' when last we met," he said.

Jane surveyed him rapidly from head to foot. "Oh, I can remember you quite well. I am so glad to see you. It is your voice that I can recall most easily—Cousin Arthur, you are—are——"

"Grown old," suggested the man who stood holding her hand.

"It is I who have grown old," said Jane, holding fast by the kind hand that pressed hers, so as to say he sympathized with her sorrow, and knew all that those long, womanly-cut black garments were meant to tell. "I have grown *so* old. It is *years* since I saw you. I had forgotten you. Now so much comes back. I remember crowds of things. You are—are *so* welcome, dear cousin, so very welcome here, to me."

"Thank you," he said, and he kissed her hand before he dropt it. "You give me just the welcome that I wanted to have. Peter will leave you with Miss Teague for a year, I am told. I shall be gone again in a month. But don't forget Coombe. I am delighted to hear you know it so well. It will always please me to hear of your interest in the old place. I shall dine here again next week. You must all come to me one day. Will you fix a day, Miss Teague? I have no engagements."

Major Penwarne was nine years older than Peter Drake—that is, he was thirty-five, and he looked his age. But he was, without any doubt, one of the handsomest of men. Jane, there and then, woke up to this fact; and when she spoke of it to Miss Teague that night, her friend replied that it had "always been a pleasure to look at Major Penwarne." And after that they had sat and praised him for some time.

It had not escaped Miss Teague that Jane had suddenly ceased to be frightened at her brother's perfections, and scared by his cold style of putting his expectations. She astounded Peter that night, and he had confessed his gratification very honestly to Miss Teague. Major Penwarne had brought back the sunshine to the house. Her father had loved him always, and she as a little child had loved him too. She was blooming into womanhood in the genial atmosphere of his presence. He had known her life

better than Peter had ever known it; and by the time that Major Penwarne had eaten his second dinner at Trederrick, it was a fixed idea in Jane's mind that "he could understand."

He had cured her of crying in another week. They had all been at Coombe for a delightful day, and he had taught her how to look forth on life, and contemplate the things worth living for. She had obtained an idea of the sort of woman Major Penwarne could admire, and she was going to be self-made, on that model. Life in the present was altogether a different thing to Jane, and the untrodden paths of the future were, as far as she could see, lighted by his bounty, warmed by his smiles, filled with the music of his voice, and made safe by his approval.

So, before Peter left them to go again to Berlin, he told Miss Teague she had been quite right; he really had not seen into Jane's character at first; she had been crushed quite out of natural shape by the calamity that had befallen them. "And Arthur Penwarne—" he said—"and I know no better judge of a gentlewoman than Arthur—has the highest opinion of Jane's character, and abilities. He says she is quite charming."

Miss Teague made an interior thanksgiving.

When Peter went away Jane wept loving tears, which pleased him, and they promised to write to each other; and the same afternoon Major Penwarne came down on horseback to take Jane out. And she on her steady grey, with old John the groom at a respectful distance, rode all round Coombe and back by the downs. Again and again this happened, till Arthur Penwarne went back to Portsmouth, and embarked for India once more. Jane could hardly believe in her desolation. She cried again bitterly, but not in the old way, which seemed to be beyond consolation. She was to write to Major Penwarne, and he would write to her, and he was to come back in two years—and then? Jane certainly had never asked that question. But Miss Teague had.

It would, notwithstanding the disparity of age, be the very best thing that could happen. And age is not the only thing—"Jane," she said, "did Major Penwarne ever tell you that he had been married?"

"Oh, yes; yesterday. I never knew it till yesterday. I don't care about that. He was married, and papa did not like it. And she died. She had been married before; and

she had a son. He is going to bring the boy back, and if he liked it he could leave the army and live at Coombe. Oh, how dull life will be without Cousin Arthur!"

No doubt it would be dull without this accomplished cousin, for Jane's world was circumscribed and not very closely inhabited. She would have said on this subject that there was all the village, and the lawyer, and the doctor, and Sir Harry Goodman of Marsland, who was always kind to her, and who she knew rode by a roundabout way home, even after a hard day's sport, to ask after her, and say a friendly word to Miss Teague. Also there were *girls*—Sir Harry lumped his two daughters and his ward, Lady Mary Liniker, altogether as *The girls*—and as far as Jane's experience of the feminine gender, in her own life and of her own sort, there were no other girls in the world.

She certainly disliked Lady Mary, who was the owner of a pretty place close to Marsland, where Sir Harry lived; for she was peevish and fanciful. But she endured Miss Goodman, who was very gentle, and she petted little Eleanor—declaring however always, and openly, that she liked Freddy, a child aged four, best of all. Certainly all her world put together would not console her for the loss of Arthur Penwarne.





CHAPTER III.

OBEDIENCE.

What thou bidd'st
Unargued I obey; so God ordains.—MILTON.

TO get Jane safely married was the one grand idea, towards the fulfilment of which all other ideas tended, in the mind of Marian Teague.

It was a good time of the year for meditation. Is not autumn of all seasons most full of thoughts?

Life, with the beloved old Squire, had been full of blessedness; life with Peter, notwithstanding his many perfections, would be full of sacrifices, and sacrifices too for things that would be felt by Jane and herself to be worth nothing.

The sunshine was lying about with its October glitter, the birds had not done singing, the shadows of clouds were chasing across sea and land, and the sweet scents and sounds of husbandry were on every side. Miss Teague made her meditation leaning on the parapet wall which edged the great terrace, and looking down on the rich blooms of autumn flowers, and the fiery tints of red shumach and bright yellow furze. The sea was spread out in one intense field of dark blue; black patches of silver light coming and going; reflections of the bright heaven above, and the masses of pillowy clouds with one side dark, soft and shadowy, and the other flashing against the sun in silvery white.

It was the figure of an attractive woman that was leaning on the cut stone, wondering, wishing, hoping, planning, and, after a fashion, praying too. She was the only real friend Jane had in the world. For that girl Marian Teague had, in a sense, annihilated herself. Of course it was good, gentlewoman as she was, to earn sixty pounds a year; but it might have been earned in ways

more suited to her condition. It had been for love of Jane that she had chosen the life of something very like a servant; and now she was quite past her youth, and never going to be married. It struck her that she had bought Jane's life with her own. To make her happy she had done this. And Jane must be happy. She had promised Jane's mother that she would leave nothing undone for the good of her baby, and she had kept her word. She had not been unhappy in the life she had chosen for herself; but it had had its disadvantages—she should never be married!

But at that moment Miss Teague's meditations took an extremely practical turn. She thought that, possibly, her French accent had deteriorated since she was a child at school at Boulogne, where her mother had lived for some years. Possibly too Jane had hidden talents which life with her alone would fail to bring to light. Miss Teague arranged a black bonnet more firmly on her head—a head wreathed round with masses of black hair—and she went quickly to the end of the terrace, and down to the pathway which led to the village. She had long been the obedient slave of circumstances, and she was not now, for the first time, going to shrink from her obedience.

Down the steep paved way she tripped, with a step which had often won for her very unexpected admiration. She got into what was politely called the street, though it was as unlike a street as any one can imagine; she passed the general shop, called "the merchant's," and kept by "Marchant Gedds," who was also farmer and fisherman, and knew no more of the merchandise which occupied his wife's life than the license over the door imparted to him. She passed the two elms which marked "town end," and turned up a wide way, with spreading turf on one side, where lads played ball on holidays, and geese asserted themselves with daily increasing loudness, the customs of St. Michael just past, notwithstanding. Then Miss Teague went through a wicket gate into a bright little garden, with pebbled walks edged with shells and sea-pink; and as she looked at the whitewashed cottage and its green-painted wood-work porch, now covered with a hanging bower of clematis, she hoped in her heart that Desirée d'Antoine might have arrived.

She walked in most unceremoniously, and knocked at a door on the right-hand side. An old woman appeared

from the kitchen premises and gave her a stare. "Oh, Miss Teague!—yes, ma'am, missis is at home; walk in higher side, please."

So Miss Teague opened the right-hand door after another knock, and she was met by the person she wished to see.

"I want to know if your niece is come. You said you expected her."

"She has been here a week. I have expected you every day."

"Oh, Mrs. Clarkson, I never heard of it. The departure of—no—many things, in fact, I have had my hands too full to allow of my heart being at play. But I want to talk to you."

"Come inside and take a seat then," said Mrs. Clarkson, with her old penetrating brown eyes fixed on her visitor's face. "What's up with you?"

Mrs. Clarkson sat down, knitting in hand, on a soft-cushioned chair covered with patch-work; and Miss Teague took possession of a low leather-covered stool on the opposite side of the extremely small fire, where a sedate-looking little kettle seemed to be undertaking the process of boiling the water for tea in a peculiarly leisurely manner. There was nothing to betoken the gentlewoman in Mrs. Clarkson, if you excepted the long straight nose and steady eyes. In fact she had been a servant all her unmarried life, and she had married Sir Henry Goodman's house steward. But she had never forgotten that her father's name was Caryll, and that he had been the last in the male succession of a house that had once been great. He had lived poor, and died poor. His eldest daughter had got a place in a nursery in France, and she had married what people called well. It sounded rather grand to talk of Madame d'Antoine; but she had died, and her husband too; he had never been young within his wife's experience; and their only child, Desirée, had been to a French academy and had studied hard. She had won praises, and free education; gilt medals, and her *diplôme*, and to all these triumphs had succeeded a place in a German family, to teach four little girls to speak French, Italian, and English, and to sing if they could. She had got ill. Worn out and tired, the wise doctor said. Had she no relations to go to? So Desirée had written to her aunt.

"May I come for six months? Less won't do. I have got gold to the amount of about fifty pounds in your money.

The family here are going to Rome for the winter, and in six months they will take me again. I could spare twenty-five pounds out of my fifty. I do not think I shall eat and drink any more, and that much, as I am of a managing mind, and an independent spirit, I should like to pay." Miss Teague had read this outspoken letter, and was pleased to find Mrs. Clarkson had answered that, if Desirée could sleep in a room eight feet square, she was welcome to come, and that seven shillings a week would fully pay her expenses in firing and food, if she could live as her aunt lived and be thankful.

Knowing all this, Miss Teague asked to see Desirée immediately.

"She is out on the coast. Morning, noon, and night she is painting. She would do nothing else if she had her own way. But she is a good girl, and I like her so far well enough. And now why do you want her?"

"I want her to come as day governess to Miss Drake."

"Humph!" grunted Mrs. Clarkson, surveying her knitting, and stretching the half-made stocking over her hand; "I have nothing to say. She has been here a week, and all I know is that she is as strong as Samson, supposing he was head and hand both alike. She can decide like a judge, and see her ways like a lawyer; and then—well, not the whole bench of Bishops would turn her the breadth of a hair aside. I am expecting her every moment. She is a clock for punctuality. Would you pass through that door into the parlour; she comes up through the orchard generally; you may see her belike."

Miss Teague did as Mrs. Clarkson desired, and so in another moment was standing at a casement window looking through the diamond-paned glass. And she saw through the branches of the brown and yellow apple-trees a girl walking up the steep bank on which they stood. The girl had her hat in her hand, and her drawing portfolio was slung across her shoulders as a soldier carries his knapsack. She stood still just at a point where the sea came in sight and made a dark blue background, against which her head and neck came out in full fresh colour of pink and white. Her almost red hair was bronzed in the setting sun, and the shadows of the branches which were above her made a varying pattern on her pale-coloured dress. Desirée was standing gazing on the shining rich green of a great arbutus which grew grandly among the old apple-trees,

and was now covered with its wavy little flowerbells, dripping as if it were with pearly tears. With a gesture which might have meant weariness she withdrew her eyes from the sight that seemed to fascinate them, and came on slowly to the little terrace edged with columbine which was outside the window, and then Marian Teague brought a smile to her face by kissing her hand to her. Large dark eyes sparkled merrily, on which Miss Teague turned away to meet her new friend at the door.

The introduction and the business of the moment came together. "I am Miss Teague, from Frederrick. I have charge of Miss Drake. You are going to be here for six months. I want you to come to the house and teach her every day, or, at least, three or four times a week."

"But I am here for rest—for physie—to save my life I thought six weeks ago. I am very precious over my life, and I enjoy rest beyond words. How could I begin to teach anybody now?"

"Oh! quite easily. Just an hour—one or two. Perhaps you had better see Jane—see Miss Drake, I mean. I cannot stop more than five minutes; I am going to say good-bye to Mrs. Clarkson. You can at least visit me and see the house and the pictures at eleven o'clock to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes, I can do that;" and Desirée laughed. "Of course I shall like to do that; but I give no pledges for the future."

"That will be enough for to-morrow." Then Miss Teague made her farewells, and walked back to Frederrick.

The next morning brought Desirée, one of the most accomplished little Frenchwomen that ever existed, with the highest imaginable capabilities for *understanding*. She took in the whole situation and every individual's position immediately. Power, capacity, the best of good-wills, and an unconquerable perseverance, walked into old Frederrick with Mademoiselle d'Antoine. Everything about her seemed to bring out her affections. She delighted in the old house, its surroundings, and its family history. She was fascinated by the odd loneliness that appeared to belong to Jane's place in life. The quiet past, with its serene colouring of love, and the uncertain present, full of possibilities, with nothing in it warm enough for hope, nor cold enough for fear, yet chequered with shadowy dread, and a something—as yet nameless, which might gild all life, and make it

glad, even to the grave. It was a very poetical life to the mind of Desirée, who fell in love with Jane, and, having done so, was determined to make her heroine a very killing and perfectly accomplished demoiselle.

So the autumn and the winter passed, full of work, overflowing with interest, and rich in the new fruits of an utterly new life.

Desirée and Miss Teague fatigued themselves in that labour of love; and to all three in after-life that time—the time when they all lived alone, at old Trederrick—was a green spot in their memories, for ever bright and peaceful, always yielding joy, and out of which the roots of all strength seemed to grow.

But when the first week of April came in the following year, Desirée departed. The fairy who had been disentangling all the threads of life, and placing all its colours in harmonious juxtaposition, was gone.

Perhaps now they would have been dull had not a great event come to them. Peter wrote that he was going to be married. He was to marry Lady Judith Towercourt, whom he admired greatly, and approved to his heart's content. It would prevent his coming back for another year. He was greatly obliged for all Miss Teague's goodness, and delighted to hear of Jane—could things go on with the same success for one year more?

Jane would be only sixteen and a half when he returned, calculated Peter; and then she could not be got rid of for two years. She was in the way, no doubt. Perhaps his grandmother would take her.

Miss Teague made a very correct guess at all that was in Peter's mind. She, too, thought of Lady Dynham, and she proceeded to write to her. In this letter she described Jane as she thought she deserved to be described, and she proposed the possibility of Jane paying a visit to Lady Dynham in the following month to that lady's consideration.

Lady Dynham was, at that time, a brisk little old widow. When the late Lord Dynham, her step-son, had come into possession of Dynely Court, she had begun her dowager life in a small house in London, quite as perfect in all its appointments as even she herself could desire. Her letter now was like herself; strong, positive, sharp, unbelieving, and merrily malicious.

She thanked her dear, good Marian Teague for her capital letter, and for all the devotion she had shown that

poor child. "As to Peter, you know he has been caught, and so made a fool of himself. Lady Judith is past thirty. I know, for I dined in their house when she was just three months old. A lovely baby, who grew to be a terrible child, and a girl of design, a flirt on principle. She broke the heart of one honest man, as I have heard said on very good authority. He is married, and happy, we may hope; so I shall not tell his name. But it gave me a bad opinion of her. She took to blue stockings at twenty-seven, and, for so handsome a girl, led a rather odd and independent life. Now she has caught Peter. She was experienced enough to know how to flatter him, and he has swallowed the hook scientifically baited. I daresay it will do very well. But as to poor little Jane—you know I always did wish that it had pleased a kind Providence to take her when my poor daughter died. As to having her here on a visit—my dear good soul, it would end in her being sent to live with me. You don't think that Lady Judith will begin life at Trederrick, out of the world though it be, with such a beauty as you say Jane is by her side. Of course she must be got rid of somehow. But sufficient for the day, &c. Peter won't be back as soon as he says. Lady Judith likes continental life. I had good reason to know before my Lord, my poor dear step-son, died, that my grandson Peter had thrown away too much money to be able to live in the state that would in these days be expected of the Master of Trederrick; so he will not, in this instance, object to his wife's following her fancy. Lord Dynham has met him abroad, and he likes his cousin. There is some distant sort of connexion between Lady Dynham and Lady Judith; so they seem happy at the match; and that is very comfortable, you know. I am glad you think Jane graceful. It is a better thing than beauty, which is common enough. Write whenever you like, for you are a faithful creature, and we have always valued you. Give my blessing to the poor child. I suppose, as she was allowed to live, that she will find a place in the world somewhere. Lady Judith has money."

When Jane asked to see her grandmother's letter she was told that family affairs were dwelt on in it, and that it had been already destroyed.

Lady Dynham had prophesied well. The winter came, and Peter and his wife were abroad; and a second winter they spent in Rome. They loitered away the second sum-

mer, and did not get to England till October, when Jane was seventeen.

Peter left Lady Jwlith at Dynely Court; and he came down to Trederrick to see that the house was fit to receive its mistress.

Miss Teague anticipated the time of Peter's coming as the hour of her triumph. She had never ceased her exertions to make Jane perfect. Nature had really endowed the girl plentifully, and more people than Miss Teague and the establishment of old servants of Trederrick thought her beautiful.

Peter arrived with his still manner, constrained style, examining eyes, and general air of condescension. Cold, critical, half-surprised approval he gave to the embellishment of the gardens, and the beauties which judicious cutting and pruning had brought out all round the house. He walked into the library, one end of which had been darkened by the growth of the shrubs his mother had planted, and he found the sunlight glowing, and the far-off sea lying in the distance beyond the village elms, and over the heads of masses of flowering shrubs, with a beauty that startled him. Miss Teague was by his side.

"You ordered this sort of thing to be done," she said, "and Jane took the whole arrangement of it. This must be just what your mother wished to see it. But it had destroyed itself by its uncontrolled growth. It has been a two years' pleasure to Jane to overlook all this. I do not think that anything of your mother's planting has been removed."

"Where is Jane?" asked Peter.

"She has just come in from her ride; she is an excellent horsewoman."

Then they heard a step, and in came Jane, walking straight up to Peter, with her eyes on his face, and her cheeks glowing. All the stiffness went out of his countenance. His admiration quite overcame him. He touched her with a tender reverence, and kissed her with a smile of wondering delight.

"My dear child! This is a pleasure. How tall you are! I almost hope you have stopped growing. Pray stay as you are," he said, in a way which was intended to betray his perfect approval.

However small his heart was, her beauty had warmed it through and through. Perhaps he would not have married

Lady Judith if he had known of this, for his married life had not been perfectly blissful. He had never been in the habit of thinking of married life with any enthusiasm. Of course a man like himself loved himself, and respected himself beyond all other mortals. It had never entered his head that he might not succeed in making a woman happy. He knew that it suited his respectability to marry Lady Judith, and Lady Judith valued him sufficiently to do without those passionate emotions which make the important part of married life to some people. But when Peter looked at Jane, it suddenly struck him that he should one day have to give her to a husband, and he knew in his heart that her husband would love her in a manner very different from that in which he loved Judith; if, indeed, he could be said to love his wife at all. So he put his arm round the girl with reverence, thinking of her destiny; and he honoured her in his soul, and was happier for a few moments in his softened humanity than he had been for years. Poor Peter! and yet he had not been so very much worse than a rich young prig caught in the snare of his own priggishness.

Peter left them the next morning. But he had asked a question which had brought to light a special cause for Jane's radiant face when first he had looked at her.

"How does Coombe look; and what were the last news of Major Penwarne?"

"Major Penwarne is at home. I have seen him to-day."

In fact he had been expected for a week, and had written two letters from London to Miss Teague; and that day, in her ride, as Jane had been passing the gate that led to the house by the bridle way, the master had stood before her, and put his hand on her saddle-bow, and looked into her face.

When Major Penwarne called at Trederrick the next day Peter had departed; but Major Penwarne had stayed to luncheon, and seen many old friends about the place who wished to welcome his honour home.

Major Penwarne was still of so grand a beauty that, as Miss Teague used to say, it was a pleasure to look at him. He was to stay for some time now at Coombe. He told Miss Teague so before he left, adding—"Jane is a beautiful woman, and you have done her justice—but I wish when I look at her that you could take ten years off my life."

Then Miss Teague fastened her dove's eyes on his face,

and said, "Never mind that," in a tone so serious as to make him blush like a girl.

He went home with their echo in his heart.

Never mind—*what?* Was he to be indifferent to Jane, or to the great obstacle that seemed to be between them? Already he had heard Jane spoken of. Those of the old neighbours who had already welcomed him had spoken of Jane and praised Miss Teague. Perhaps her husband was fixed upon—"I could make her as happy as a queen!" he said. "I could bless every day of her life."

After a few days Lady Judith and Peter arrived. It was quite late at night when they came, which Jane accepted as a mercy. So there were only hurried greetings, great talk of head-ache and fatigue, no little confusion, strong tea, and going to bed.

The next morning only Peter appeared, and breakfast was served to Lady Judith in her room. Peter was stiff, dignified, and evidently nervous. At last Lady Judith swept into the room, with symptoms of discomposure on her generally tranquil face.

"Good morning, dear," she said to Jane. "Why, you ought to be in the school-room, shouldn't you?" Jane looked unutterable surprise out of the liquid depths of her beautiful eyes. "Bring me that footstool, please." Jane stood still with the gaze of astonishment fixed on the unceremonious lady in gorgeous raiment who was filling the arm-chair before her.

Miss Teague walked forward from the writing-table, and placed the footstool for Lady Judith.

Then that lady looked straight at Jane, and, smiling, showed a row of very white teeth. "Oh!" she sighed forth—"Oh!—You want a little breaking-in, I think. Now, Miss Teague, I wish to be understood at once. I know you have resisted the only sensible thing. You have persisted in keeping Jane from school. She is only seventeen this month. Her manners are sufficiently odd, I am sure; but I don't wonder at that; and my plan is that she should go to school for two years. Then I will introduce her. I have been telling Mr. Drake so to-day. Indeed I have been telling him so for a week."

"Excuse me, Lady Judith," began Miss Teague; "you scarcely know—you can't know. Jane is not likely to be a trouble to you—"

"Don't go on, please. We shall have several people in

the house this very afternoon, on a week's visit at least. You know the house is going to be quite full for the next month; and I wish to be understood *at once*. Jane must be considered as a school-girl—I suppose you have a school-room—her things must be prepared immediately. At nineteen I will have her in the house and introduce her, as I said just now; and I think, Jane, that after to-day you must not be in this room in the morning. Keep yourself to your own room, my dear. And don't think that I speak in a hurry, or from any personal prejudice. I have had some time to think the matter over, and during the last week I have had a hard debate with your brother. But that is all over now. And as this is the only morning we shall be alone for some time, I am, of course, right to speak. Good gracious, Miss Teague, what kind of manners have you taught the child? Did one ever see such an expression on anybody's face before?"

"Perhaps not," said Jane.

"My dearest," entreated Miss Teague.

"You know Major Penwarne, Lady Judith," pursued Jane.

"I am going to be married to him."

"He! He is old enough to be your father!"

"And yet I am not too young to be his wife,"—with an earnestness that had a revelation in it. And so saying, Jane fled out of the room.

"Miss Teague," said Lady Judith, with dignity, "this is wrong, very wrong, indeed—we should have been told."

"Major Penwarne proposed to Jane this morning." We met him in our walk before breakfast. Jane would have told her brother, but he came down so manifestly discomposed," said Miss Teague maliciously. "However, he is gone to Coombe. Major Penwarne left a message for him."

"It is the most extraordinary thing," said Lady Judith—but she was speaking to empty walls. Jane had found her master, and Miss Teague had transferred her obedience. She was gone in pursuit of her darling.





CHAPTER IV.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS.

And so at last he neared the well-known land,
Could see the hills in ancient order stand,
With friendly faces, whose familiar gaze
Looked through the sunshine of his childish days.

GEORGE ELIOT.

AFTER twenty years Colonel Penwarne brought his wife back to England, and enthroned her at Coombe. Correspondence had been carried on with regularity between India and Trederrick, and the meeting between the brother and sister had been really affectionate. But Peter had grown old, thin, colourless, and strange. Perhaps Jane loved him all the better for this; anyhow, she loved him, and he seemed to kindle into brighter humanity as the sunshine of her beauty and happiness came to his somewhat gloomy life.

Twenty years had wrought many changes on Jane's old friends and neighbours. Lerrins had sunk into a farmhouse, and the objectionable Lady Mary lived with her husband and daughter in Yorkshire. Sir Harry Goodman's eldest girl had married and come back to take care of him as a widow. The pet boy, Freddy, Mrs. Penwarne had left in India; and little Eleanor had married the Vicar of Trederrick, Mr. Baynard.

In twenty years the world changes considerably, even in the slowest-going corners of the earth. Twenty years had changed many things at old Trederrick; and yet it had changed Peter very little, and that is saying, in other words, that Peter was a decidedly odd sort of man.

Let any one, man or woman, remain unchanged for twenty years, unchanged in their habits, manners, customs, and in the cut of their garments, and what remarkable

oddities they will appear to surrounding observers. So Peter at eight-and-forty was an oddity. He wore strange-coloured waistcoats, and buttons that must have been made on purpose for him; he had shoes of a make that were called "the Squire's," and industrious beavers had to be periodically slaughtered to furnish him with the old-fashioned hat. He was still the same thoroughly *bookish* kind of man, but he was not the popular person that he had been in his youth. It had ceased to be worth his while to be agreeable. He had made his life, and had not found it a particularly enchanting one. He had, however, ceased to worship himself with the ardour and faith that had belonged to old times, and the consequence was he was a little ill-tempered, for passing years had not given him any other object of devotion.

He was, as nearly as a husband can be, indifferent in his heart to Lady Judith. He was politely severe to her, and yet he was really desirous that she should be happy. He would, on occasions, make some remark, such as, "That is a very beautiful bracelet, is it not, Judith?" when she had dressed herself with unusual splendour, and his eye was attracted by the sight of an ornament not often exhibited; and then she would look at him as if he were quite as great a curiosity in his own way, but not nearly as valuable, as the gem she was wearing; and she would give him some civil little answer, which he would accept with an air of the very highest respect.

Such speeches were almost the only instances of personal interest that ever publicly passed between them.

He had his own book-room, sacred to his own litter, and there he might be said to live. He studied health in everything, and was learned in diet. He rode out every day on the best horse that money could buy; but he was a studious solitary man, and seldom visited any of their old friends, leaving all that kind of thing to his wife. The twenty-two years of his married life had given him a son who had died—the people said, "Poor Squire never got over that stroke"—and a daughter who, at this present time, was nineteen years of age. She was extremely pretty, and her father would gaze at her through his double-glasses, for his sight had grown weak, as if he were contemplating one of the curiosities of creation.

Altogether Letty Drake was a wonderful girl. She was as clever as her father, and as warm-hearted as Aunt Jane

—that Aunt Jane who had married Major Penwarne all in a hurry, from her grandmother's house in London, and gone to India; that Aunt Jane of whom the villagers loved to speak; that Aunt Jane whose childish playthings and girlish books remained in the house, and had been, all of them, pleasant mysteries to Letty from the earliest period of reason. Letty had always loved to hear of Aunt Jane, and the rare times when her father would speak to her freely about this aunt were precious moments in Letty's memory.

She always had felt that her mother did not like Aunt Jane; and then there was that mysterious Hugo Penwarne, Major Penwarne's stepson. It was so odd that he should be called Penwarne. It had been one of her father's pursuits to trace the pedigree of this boy, and of the very little that was known Letty knew every particular; but this boy's history was almost a forbidden subject with her mother.

At last came a year which brought the Penwarne home from India, to settle at Coombe. Colonel Penwarne had had an excellent military appointment for several years; and the term of this appointment being over, he was coming back to the old house to live. Accordingly, he and his wife, now a very beautiful woman of thirty-seven, and their only child Alice, who was six months younger than Letty, arrived at Coombe in the autumn, then spent the winter in London and Brighton, and returned to Coombe early in the following spring.

Colonel Penwarne's father had once said to old Squire Drake that Coombe was paradise in *his* eyes. And like paradise it had always looked to Alice, whose approval was unbounded, and found expression in every look and word.

"Oh mother! our beautiful home! We are never going off again to wander by sea or land as we have been doing all my life. This is rest, isn't it?"

"I hope so," would be the quiet answer. And the mother and child, like two sisters, would wander away to the old haunts of Jane's girlhood, till Alice would stop, wanting a new audience for her expressions of rapture.

"Oh I wish dear darling Miss Teague was here; and I am so glad Hugo comes next week."

Miss Teague had gone with Jane to India, had brought Alice to England at nine years old, had lived near her for

seven years, and taken her back to her parents at sixteen. She had now returned with them.

The cottage in which she had first made the acquaintance of Desirée D'Antoine, and where Desirée's aunt, Mrs. Clarkson, had lived and died, was being fitted up under her own direction for herself, and she was too busy for more than an occasional visit.

In a few days Hugo arrived. He was a captain in the army, and said to be one of the best officers in the service, and he was welcomed by Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne like a son.

He was not a stranger at Coombe, nor in the village of Trederrick; for he had been partly educated in England, and he and Alice, under Miss Teague's care, had often spent holidays at Coombe.

Young people are not long in forming opinions. These young people at Coombe, with their grown-up experiences, soon made acquaintance with the people at Trederrick, and they made up their minds on their characters with considerable speed; whether rightly or wrongly, was left for the future to show.

"Alice," said Mrs. Penwarne, who was sitting in the bay of a window which opened on the lawn, while her daughter was busy with her paint and painting-brushes in a little window at the furthest corner of the room which was long and narrow—"Alice, who passed the window?"

"Hugo, mama. He went to Trederrick this morning. He went there to luncheon. They have people in the house, and Uncle Peter asked him this morning—oh, here he is!"

Captain Penwarne came into the room and dropped into a chair by Mrs. Penwarne's side. "And what was it like at Trederrick?" asked Alice.

"I don't know."

"Not know—how odd! Why don't you know?"

"I can't understand anything there to-day. I can't understand *humbug*—I know nothing about *humbug*. I couldn't even spell the word if I were asked."

"Oh, I can," said Alice briskly, and looking round with her face glowing; "I can. Now listen: T-r-u-t-h spells *humbug*, Aunt Judith taught me."

Mrs. Penwarne looked grave.

"You had better not have gone there, Hugo," she said.

"But Mr. Drake asked me. He has never done one civil thing to me, though he has made civil speeches, for the six

weeks I have been here. Everybody else has been civil enough. Even Lady Judith looks civil, and contemplates me, not entirely with indifference, sometimes. Besides, it was a grand luncheon, and I like luncheon."

"My dear boy, there was luncheon at home. You don't go about to eat, do you?"

"To be able to appreciate food is natural and right. Eating is the first thing in life, and it is so by nature."

"Till education begins," suggested Mrs. Penwarne.

"Education confirms the taste."

"Hugo, you are contradictory."

"A was an apple and put in a pic," said Alice from her corner, coming to the rescue. Then Mrs. Penwarne laughed, and Hugo walked to Alice's side, and criticized her water-colours. He was a very good artist, and had constituted himself her drawing master.

The talk had been silly enough, but Mrs. Penwarne, who was a very wise woman, had found something to think about. She left the room, and she went to Colonel Penwarne's study and said, "Are you busy?"

"No, my darling. That is, not too busy to give you the time you ask for. Is anything the matter?"

"Why, no; I suppose not. They are so odd at Frederick."

"They were always odd. But they are no worse, as far as we are concerned, for that."

Then Colonel Penwarne pushed away his bundle of letters, and tidily placed a paper-weight on them. He was the most orderly and industrious of men; and he rose up and came to his beautiful wife's side, looking very admiringly into her puzzled face.

"Have it all out with Peter," she said.

"Certainly, my dear. But what may you mean by *it*?" And he laughed softly.

She laughed too then. They looked curiously like lovers. Perhaps they were laughing at that. He put his arm round her waist, and turning her lovely face towards his own, he kissed her. Then she rested her hand on his shoulder and said:

"It is about Hugo I want you to speak. It would be a great pain to my heart to have any quarrel with Peter; but something very uncomfortable must occur if they don't behave properly to Hugo. I would take his side even against my own brother," she spoke quite vehemently—"as to Lady Judith," she went on.

"Oh, Lady Judith," interrupted Arthur Penwarne, "is a privileged person. I am quite sure you would never have married me if you had not been unable to carry on life with her. I am Lady Judith's most obedient—we are, in the perfection of our intercourse, examples to the whole earth. Figuratively, I kiss Lady Judith's hand whenever I approach her; and, in fact, I think she admires me. I do indeed."

His wife nodded her head and smiled provokingly. She would not dilate about Lady Judith.

"You had better place Hugo in an understood position at Trederrick," she said. "Only you can do it. If you do not do it, there will be a quarrel. I *can't*, or I *won't* endure any saucy treatment of Hugo. I have always felt like a mother to him. As we have had no son of our own, our adoption of him is a recognized fact in our lives, and as such it must be accepted."

Then she told Colonel Penwarne what Hugo had said, and she entered at full length into her own happiness at again being near the old home, at once more seeing Peter, and being on perfectly sisterly terms with him. "I shall wish I had never come back, if we are not to be at peace," she said, with the tears in her eyes.

He felt her earnestness, and loved her for it. He knew that the danger of a domestic war was imminent. He had quite made up his own mind as to the terms on which his stepson was to be received, and he agreed with his wife that the first signs of dissent from his irrevocable will in this matter had better be noticed. "Only you must quite make up your own mind," he said, looking at her with great gravity.

"I have. He is our son: If you should inherit dear old Trederrick, the entail ends with you, and you can leave it to Hugo by will. I *have* made up my mind. He ought to have the place. Hugo is a Penwarne; and, in fact, the male heir. As such Peter and Lady Judith must accept him. Only Hugo's own misconduct can shake our resolution; and I should as soon expect the stars to fall as Hugo to go wrong. A better man does not live; and he is so son-like. He quite reconciles me to not having had a boy of my own. As to Alice—you know we have talked of her. We have been very prosperous——"

Then Mrs. Penwarne talked some good, strong business talk—talk which was practical. She had not weighed out the sugar, and learnt the price of provisions, and kept

Marian Teague's account for nothing, in the old days of her youth at Trederrick. With all her beauty and elegance, and all her girlish-heartedness, she was one of the most practical women alive, with a gift for making up her mind, and adhering to a considerably formed opinion.

So, when she began to speak of Alice, she reckoned the value of purchased land and money laid by; but Colonel Penwarne stopped her with a caress. "Darling," he said, "I have always intended Alice to marry him."

"Marry Hugo!—" as if it were a new idea.

"Yes. Why not?"

"Oh, because people *will* marry as they please."

"He can't find any one more calculated to please him than Alice."

"She is charming."

"And he? Where in the world could she find a better mate?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Why look so frightened, then? What scares you?"

"Your wishing it scares me."

"Surely *our* wishing it is a great step towards its accomplishment."

"But she must marry just as she likes—*must*—"

"If she can, you should say," said Colonel Penwarne, laughing.

"Of course she can."

"Then try to be wise, and motherly, and suggestive. I am sure mothers have a great deal in their power. Make her learn to love Hugo."

"Ah, but if Hugo shouldn't—"

"How contradictory!" and this time Colonel Penwarne laughed very loud, with quite irrepressible amusement. "Poor little wife; puzzled little mother! We are caught in our own snare, darling. There is no other way out of our troubles but to marry those two at once. How soon? Is three months long enough? Shall I speak to Hugo to-night?"

These were some of those true words that are spoken in jest, and Mrs. Penwarne knew it. Her heart trembled within her.

She fully believed that her husband would inherit Trederrick. He was many years older than her brother, but Peter had become a wizen, broken, odd old man, and Colonel Penwarne was as strong as in the days of his youth,

blessed with perfect health, and to look at he was magnificent still, and that not only in his wife's eyes, but in the eyes of a large and admiring world; and she was quite willing that all should go to the next heir male, their adopted son; but that anything should occur to make Hugo feel that he *must*—that he was put upon honour to marry Alice—that was dreadful. That Alice should not be loved as *she* had been, and still was loved—that Alice should have less than worship, and not know, as she had known, that there was still paradise upon earth! She was dreadfully romantic. In spite of all the practical knowledge as to sugar and tea—of all the old life of head and hand work—notwithstanding good Marian Teague, and the account-books, and the pence-table, and all the many ups and downs of life that had led at last to this pleasant rest, she was really dreadfully romantic, and she shivered and trembled and looked up like a frightened fawn into her husband's steady eyes—"Please to let it all alone, Arthur," she gasped.

"What, and not go to Trederrick?"

"I don't mean that. Go to Trederrick, and speak to Peter about Hugo. But do nothing as to Alice. If they do it of their own accord it will be well; if not, it must be bad."

"And you will run the risk of everything going away from your own?"

"Oh! yes," she cried in a hurry. "Yes, I love Hugo. I have no objection to him. I should like it. But Alice must be loved as you loved me. She, too, must love as—as I love you, dearest, best—oh Arthur!"

Then he took her gently into his strong arms, and smiled the tears away which her eyes were shedding. She had been the happiest wife in the world, she said, and thought. She had made a very proud and happy husband. And it was as much because it was his will as because it was her own that she had determined on having Hugo's position in the family declared without delay; but when Alice wished to marry, that happy lover must be her king of men; and Alice to him must be like the first fair Eve, "wisest, virtuous, discreet, best." Certainly marriage had not cured Mrs. Penwarne of romance.



CHAPTER V.

LADY JUDITH'S PECULIARITIES.

They are all weapons, and they dart
Like porcupines from every part.—COWLEY.

MRS. PENWARNE went back to the pretty long room where the spring roses were wreathing themselves round the windows, and found her daughter busy at her painting-table. She stood over her for a minute. "You inherit that gift from your father," she said; then, "Where is Hugo?"

"Gone to the sands. The tide is low. I am not going to ride to-day, so he is exercising Fairy. He will go by the sands to Gwilter Bay, then up the cliff, and home by the road. How vexed he seemed about Lady Judith!"

"Call her Aunt Judith. I do not want anything between us to look stiff. Your Uncle Peter had just begun to love me when I went away from him. The memory of those days is so pleasant. We must do everything to keep happy with him and Aunt Judith, my dear."

"I like Uncle Peter—I wonder about him. I think he has been crushed out of his right shape by having been sat upon for so many years. I could love Letty too—I know I could. I even want to be allowed to love her—oh, I want that very much!"

"Who prevents it?"

"She does. There is a something—I cannot the least imagine what it is—but this something says, '*take care*' to me perpetually, as if she had concealed thorns about her somewhere, and would warn me, lest I should get pricked."

"Indeed! I have only felt that Letty is just a little bit peculiar. But then her life, her home, her devotion to her father, which is very great, and a certain something——"

"Ah! you too come to it, you see."

"No, love; I only meant to say a certain singularity in her position towards her mother. She has had an odd mother, you know."

Alice made a pretty little face, odd enough, nevertheless, to match the sentiment it was intended to illustrate, and her mother with an ill-suppressed smile went on:

"Those things may have some effect on character, and character gets expressed in manner; but I should like you and Letty to love each other."

"Mother, you are the dearest and best of all mothers, and yet I, the most loving and dutiful of children, take leave to tell you that you know nothing about it. Lady Judith—I beg your pardon—Aunt Judith, in the natural perversity of her heart, is dreadfully frightened at the thought of Letty and I loving each other. The gifts, and graces, and treasures, and joys which belong to good fathers and mothers, and children, and homes, Aunt Judith has systematically trampled underfoot. They would have grown at Trederrick very well, only she crushed out their first shoots always. Now she would not like Letty to feed in our pastures, where you and my father have been continually cultivating the things that she has stamped out of existence. Letty's path in life lies in barren, dry, merciless, glittering gravel-walks, as hard as the iron roller which is the only thing that ever passes there except her own footsteps; and my life has been through green meadows with sunny skies, springing flowers, and

'By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds make madrigals.'

Now Letty might 'sigh for fresh fields and pastures new,' if she were to love me and learn more of our life; and Aunt Judith is wise, she does not approve of it. Letty too is wise, and *very good*—oh, mother, I know that I *must* love Letty; and if she loves me—why, I shall be the ruin of her!" And Alice rose up, having finished her work, and looking into Mrs. Penwarne's grave face, gave a little laugh and said, "Are you alarmed at all my poetry and wisdom? Remember, mother, I have been here in my school holidays. I have reigned here often; you—not till now. I can never forget Letty's terrible childhood. But, in truth, I have even studied the subject, and I have discussed it all through with Hugo; and Hugo says I am quite right, and that I have great observation. Was not that a fine compliment?"

There was not time for her mother to answer her. The door opened, and in walked Letty.

Miss Drake was, everybody said, exactly in face like her father, and such as he was in the fulness of his youthful beauty, all softened and tempered by her sex, with a smaller mouth, a sweeter smile, a dimpled cheek, and the prettiest chin in the world. Out of her large lustrous eyes beamed a womanly nature. Her glances were less generally civil than her father's used to be when all women admired him; but they were far more loving, and, in consequence, more sincere. She was not hard like him, but there was something about her which people found it very difficult to understand.

Up to his marriage with Lady Judith, Mr. Drake had always been victorious, as if life was to be with him one continual triumph; but Letty had suffered. No part of her life, from the time she came to the use of reason, had been without suffering.

Very early she had gone through the strange trial of finding, that her mother and father were not *one*. As soon as she knew it she had begun to feel that she had to keep a secret, and even to be a peace-maker. Often, with a sort of holy instinct, the child had been the averter of storms; for Peter Drake had not yielded up so much of his life to Lady Judith without a struggle. He had fought for himself, and he had met an antagonist such as he had never expected. Still, he had fought on with all the unyielding vigour that was possible in his position, and he had never given up the struggle till the stroke came which laid them both low in a terrible trial—the death of their son.

After that, when Lady Judith had risen up from the dust down into which this and other griefs had sent her, Peter stood aside, and let her have her own way. This had been plain to everybody. He then began openly to make his own distinct life with his books, and in the management of his own property; and she rose up, and, like the women of old, anointed her hair, and dressed herself magnificently, as it were with a royal disdain of all that went against her; and certainly with a determination to rule where she could so strong as to defy expression. People felt it, saw it, knew it with a consciousness which it was impossible to mistake. But Lady Judith never spoke one bitter word which anybody could repeat; or, indeed, any word of any kind as to her great grief.

Judith Drake. She could bend everything to her will except the one obstinate fact of his existence. When she married she had been told by her own legal adviser that Trederrick was entailed on her son, should she have one; but not till that only son's death had she discovered, with certain other until then unknown things, that the entail went on, and gave the property, for which she had, as she knew, in a great measure sold herself, to Colonel Penwarne. With Colonel Penwarne, if he survived her husband, the entail ceased.

She never comforted herself by reckoning up the difference between her husband's and his cousin's years. She was of a disposition not to take comfort from common-sense calculations; and she was unhappily, of the nature which from an evil sort of jealousy likes to torment itself by expecting the worst. She had grown to believe in the succession of Colonel Penwarne to the property as a certainty. But he had no son; and she had often spent hours in reckoning up resources, and in wondering how she could best contrive to purchase Trederrick from the heir, when she should have lived to survive her husband. She had almost satisfied herself on this point, when a very small matter of business opened her eyes to its impossibility.

A farm on the entailed property had to be leased. In order to secure the desired period of occupation to the proposed tenant, the consent and signature of Arthur Penwarne had, with all legal formality, to be got from India. It came, and Colonel Penwarne wrote, saying that, remembering the years between his age and Peter Drake's, he looked on what had been done as the merest and most empty form, but, nevertheless, he accepted the opportunity thus given for speaking of his stepson. He wished his cousin to understand that, regarding Hugo as he did as the last male heir of the old Penwarne's, if ever it strangely happened that he became master of Trederrick, he should leave all the entailed property to this youth, the male heir of both houses, as an act of natural justice.

Then Lady Judith knew that in the event of her husband's dying first she should lose the place, and she revenged herself upon herself by indulging in a thousand small bitternesses, which effectually took the sweetness out of her life.

She hated Arthur Penwarne for what she called his romantic infatuation; she had no patience with Jane for

her blind devotion to her husband's ridiculous whims.—“Absolutely sacrificing her own child!” she would exclaim with well-acted horror; and as to Hugo, to wish that he had never been born came naturally—that was a matter of course; but now that she was made wise and despairing, both at once, by Colonel Penwarne's letter, she could do no other than wish him a hasty death and decent burial. Really life had been going hard with Lady Judith.

She would never take any notice of Hugo during those visits which he had paid Coombe in his boyhood. But boyhood, in its unsuspecting nature, in its happy ignorance, is neither mortified nor perplexed by a fine lady's neglects. He neither knew nor felt anything of Lady Judith's disapproval.

Mr. Drake had been very kind; he had lent him a pony, and in the winter given him a gun. Hugo thought that the world round Coombe was very pleasant, and he never wondered why he saw more of blooming Mrs. Baynard and her husband than of the relatives nearer by.

But Mrs. Baynard, who had never got over the smile which has been recorded, kept a good share of blame in her heart for Lady Judith.

“Have mercy, Eleanor,” her husband would say—“we have a daughter—have mercy.”

“But she is so very odd, Eustace.”

“So am I.”

“Nonsense. You know what I mean.”

“Yes; I do. But I have lately found out through Copley—Mr. Copley was *the* lawyer who managed the affairs of most of the influential people in those parts—I have just found out that she wanted her husband to give this living to some relative of her own; he had not told her that he had sold it to your father. When a man acts so secretly, the woman is to be pitied. You may always be sure of that. She has had her grievances, depend upon it. It makes her odd to both of us. I wonder why he did not tell her?”

Mrs. Baynard had listened with great surprise. “How vexed I should have been!” she said. “Eustace, you are never to do things without telling me.”

“I have no livings to sell, and you are not a Lady Judith.”

Mrs. Baynard had thus learnt unexpectedly the secret of some of Lady Judith's peculiarities. Her husband had sold

the family living to Sir Harry Goodman, Mrs. Baynard's father, and not only never informed her of the fact, but he had not accounted to her for the money. It was sold for several thousand pounds; and he had refused to tell her how it was invested. She was therefore in an habitual state of anger about the Baynards. They were very estimable people, no doubt. But they had nothing to do with her, and they had no business there—they were an impertinence. In that sort of light Lady Judith was apt to exhibit to herself all such persons as had the misfortune to cross her path in life. She used gravely to say, with cold inquiring eyes fixed on Peter's face, that she never could understand how the Baynards got there!

But Mr. Drake would talk to his daughter about the Baynards, and tell her how old Sir Harry had once kept hounds and been one of the most popular men in the county. Then he would gossip to Letty of that time when he came to Trederrick after his father's death, and of those two dinner parties when Sir Harry had so admired Aunt Jane, and Arthur Penwarne had renewed his acquaintance with her.

Letty would speak of this again to Mrs. Baynard, who was always very kind, feeling secretly a great deal of unnecessary pity for her; and sometimes another lady would join in the talk about old times, and speak to the eagerly listening young girl about Aunt Jane. This person was Sir Harry Goodman's eldest daughter, Mrs. Carteray.

She was about the same age as that interesting Aunt Jane; but she had not married till after her youngest sister Eleanor had become the wife of Eustace Baynard. She was, as has been said, a widow, living with Sir Harry, taking care of him in his age, and being a good nurse, and an excellent mistress of his house.

Her husband had had a son by a former wife, who had taken honours at Oxford just before their marriage. He was practising at the bar when Mr. Carteray's death broke up the old home, and when his stepmother returned to her father. But old Sir Harry was very proud of Cecil Carteray, and liked nothing better than his company. He was a very popular person in the neighbourhood, and looked up to for his abilities and his success. He often used to come to the Vicarage during his visits to Sir Harry, for he and Eustace Baynard were firm friends; and there, for several years, he had been in the habit of seeing Letty. He knew all the

family story, and had been instructed fully in all the ins and outs of the family politics. By degrees he got to know Peter Drake very well, and to like him even better than any one else liked him. He was almost young enough to be Peter's son; but life—a busy, energetic, intellectual life—had made him the equal of the elder man whose hours of learned leisure had become the best part of his existence.

Peter Drake found in Cecil Carteray a man to admire, and a companion to love. He got to look forward with a happy anxiety to his visits, and yet Cecil Carteray had not been many times at Trederrick before it was found to be among the fixed ideas of Lady Judith's mind that he was a very desirable acquaintance.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Baynard, "this is the strangest peculiarity of all. Lady Judith likes Cecil! For once, she is not blind to beauty of mind, elegance of manner, charm of features, and character beyond reproach. He is one of the noblest men in the world, and she knows it—one of the best, and she knows that too. Some one is always welcome at Trederrick whose greatness may be said to be almost of his own making!"

"Don't be scandalous, Eleanor. How can any one help liking him?" says Mr. Baynard; "there is nothing strange in it, my dear."

"Oh, but it is strange for Lady Judith to admire a person preferred by Mr. Drake. It cannot be denied, Eustace, that this one bit of nature in Lady Judith is the strangest of all her peculiarities."

Her husband felt it would be wisest to say no more.

And in this way life was going on when Colonel Penwarne returned to Coombe.





CHAPTER VI.

REVELATIONS.

This small inheritance my father left me
Contenteth me, and is worth a monarchy.
I seek not to wax great by others' waning.

SHAKESPEARE.

WHE left Letty just entering the room where her cousin Alice and Aunt Jane were talking together.

After a very affectionate greeting Alice said, "I will go and tell my father. He always likes to know when you come, Letty."

"I don't come often," said Letty.

"You cannot tell your father. I saw him go out just now. I think he is gone to Trederrick."

"Oh, I am sorry!" answered Letty. "Everybody is out. Papa is gone to see Sir Harry Goodman; my mother is gone with Lord and Lady Dynham and Sophy a long drive to the great sea view at Gwilter Bay, and I am here!" in a tone of despair.

"Take off your hat and rest yourself, and stay as long as you possibly can," said Alice. "You could stay till six o'clock. Marian Teague is coming to us this afternoon, and we are to sit out of doors under the laburnums. She could walk home by Trederrick, and take you back in time to dress for dinner."

"Charming! But if I am off duty when mamma comes home, what would happen?"

"Write a note and tell her."

"She would faint at the sight of it—think I had had some dreadful accident, and not come down to dinner."

"Send a message, then, to be given to her when she comes into the house."

"That might do, if I could make quite sure no one would forget it."

"Lady Judith is right, Alice," said Mrs. Penwarne, a little more stiffly than she had intended. "Don't press your cousin."

"But I could stay if you would send me back the short way down the crag, with some one to see that I did not come to any personal injury, and so manage that I should be standing in the hall at five o'clock."

"Of course we can do that. My father would take you, or Hugo would be back by that time, or Marian Teague and I—together we two might do instead of a man. The path is not difficult now. Steps have been cut, and strong rails put, and seats for the weary. They were finished yesterday."

"Then I can stay," said Letty. On which she walked up to a looking-glass that, in a fine old frame, stood up, long and narrow, above a table covered with china, and took off her hat.

Alice and her mother looked at Letty, and then at each other.

Mrs. Penwarne gave a little sigh to see how like the girl was to her father, in the days of his boyhood and beauty, before any one could have suspected how time would wear his fine face, and sharpen his perfectly-cut features into painful outlines. But Alice's gaze was of admiration, pure and perfect. She thought Letty the loveliest thing in creation, and there rose up strongly in her heart the yearning to love her, with a love as true and as boundless as her approval.

Letty was slight in form and easy in her movements. People said she was small, but she was really an inch taller than her cousin, who was of the full average height of woman. But her head was small, and her features perfect, with that sort of harmony about them which is so seldom seen. Her magnificent hair, and her almost Spanish complexion, kept up the idea of smallness to which her slender form and the correctness of her features gave rise at first sight. There seemed to be nothing large about her except her eyes; they were large, deep, lustrous, strange eyes, wide open, but not with the stare of habitual defiance; rather with a gaze made up of pleading and inquiry, of a

patient waiting—of an early-learn't watching through wide space—of the Peace-maker, the Averter of woe.

But for health and strength of body and mind; but for her youth; but for her love of her father; but for her life in his life, and her competence to lead that life by his early education of her in paths of unwonted learning, considering her sex—but for her knowledge that she had been called to a peculiar place with special duties attached to it; but for her perfect willingness to do those duties and to fill that place, Letty might have been sad. But she had no sadness about her, and she was very strong. Strong in heart, unwavering in good intention. Strong in duty to her apparently unloving mother, in worship of her father, in an unuttered, clearly felt determination to be just to herself if ever driven into such necessity; and, best of all, strong in a great gift of simplicity. Her life came to her hour by hour, day by day, and she never hurried it. She never wanted to meddle with her future. She left it, as the sacred, untouched "*to-come*," in the hands of God.

Now that Letty had made herself at her ease to stay with her cousin, she put her hand into a work-basket and said, "What is there for me to do?"

"You can go on with little Martin's stocking, if you please," said Mrs. Penwarne, whose basket of work for the poor was an institution revived from the tradition of old times when a girl at Trederrick.

So Letty took the knitting into her dainty little hands, and became very busy at once.

"There is my father," said Alice, in a minute more, on which the knitting was thrown down.

"I think I must walk out of the window," said Letty. The next minute she was standing on the lawn, and looking up into her uncle's face. He stooped with a grave sweet smile and kissed her.

"I am here for I do not know how many hours. Come in and talk to me."

"I can't, child. I have work to do. I wanted to see your father. But now I must write to him."

"Write to him?"

"Yes. Things that are to be once said, and for ever remembered, had perhaps better be written. I have been saying so to myself as I came up that scrambling path. So I am feeling glad that he was away."

"I wonder what it is?" whispered Letty, with her eyes

on her uncle's honest face—"what it is you are going to say to papa?"

"Not much. I am going to say that Hugo is to be treated as that which he is, my stepson and my adopted heir."

"That is known already."

Colonel Penwarne had placed his niece's hand within his arm, and was now leading her towards the open window by which she had come to meet him. "Yes, it is known," he said; "but we must get a step further than knowledge. It must be *felt*, and the knowledge and the feeling combined must influence life."

Letty paused, and held back her uncle's advancing footsteps—"It is felt; it *does* influence," she whispered, with a voice of fear and full of trouble.

"That is, it is resented," said Colonel Penwarne, coming to a sudden stop, and turning round so as to face Letty.

"If you choose to put it so," she answered with her eyes on the ground.

"By whom is it resented? I am going to write my letter. I had better know the truth, whatever it is, Letty."

"By my mother. But my father is sorry too."

"Why should your mother resent it? It is mere talk, after all, as far as Trederick is concerned. I am several years older than your father. I am sure to die first. It is in the course of nature that I should. Your mother is older than her husband; what makes her think of out-living him?"

Letty was quite silent. But she raised her eyes to her uncle's face with a look that said plainly enough, that she did not choose to discuss either her mother's motives or actions. He read the determination, and he liked her for it.

"My dear," he said, "we must have peace at any price, and brotherly love if we can get it."

"I hope so," she spoke low, but with an earnestness that made the words sound like a prayer.

Colonel Penwarne felt quite overcome. He kissed her forehead and said:

"Will you set the example of liking Hugo? You are sure to see my letter, and I wish you to see it. I know you are your father's little counsellor. When you fully understand the whole position as regards Hugo, will you understand something more as regards *me*?"

"What?"

"That I will not allow any intercourse between the families—absolutely none; that I will obliterate all memory of brother and sister between your aunt and your father, rather than have my stepson slighted, or treated in any way differently from the way dictated by me. I am right, Letty. Before God and man I am right. When that is known, it ought to be acted out with a decision that puts all debate out of the question. We are not, either of us—either Hugo or I—ever likely to inherit Trederrick. But should it ever be mine, it will, if he lives, be his. Now, set the example of acknowledging him. When you have read my letter your judgment will be convinced, and then——"

"Then I will do my best," she said. And Colonel Penwarne led her into the house.

He stopped for a few minutes, speaking to his wife and daughter, inquiring for Hugo, and asking when Marian Teague was coming; and then he went away to write his letter.

When the letter was finished he called his wife to take a copy of it.

Here it is.

"My dear Cousin Peter,"—they had always kept to the old way of addressing each other—"When a man's mind is made up irrevocably, it is perhaps best to put his determination upon paper. I write, therefore, feeling glad that I did not find you at home this morning. Will you place the letter I am now writing among your family papers, for easy reference if needed; will you also make Lady Judith fully aware of its contents? I am going to write of my stepson Hugo. His story, and mine in connexion with him, you know already. Your father knew all that there was to tell in his lifetime, for, from him, I never had a secret. But my motive now is to prevent all reference to old letters, by saying once more what my intentions are, and that it has become necessary that all my friends should respect them.

"Hugo's father I first knew in my own and in his youth, when, early in life, I made a tour through Virginia. I had been with my regiment in Canada, and in visiting Virginia I spent a sick-leave which had been granted to me. I went to Virginia, having had a boyish interest in the accounts given by the then old chronicler, Davies, of the departure of a spendthrift son of a common ancestor of yours and mine for that place. This man had taken with him the son of a Davies of that day, and that man's letters to England

had been kept—there were three of them—and I had puzzled out their meaning, and re-written them in intelligible characters and spelling, for the old Davies of my youth, now dead. Our relative had gone to Virginia in the early part of the reign of George the Second. I found, by an accident, before any seeking had been begun, the descendant of that branch of our house. He was tilling his own land. He had lost sight of all English connections; as we should have lost sight of him, but for the careful keeping of Davies's letters. He had only one son. The Davies family had died out. I traced them back for several generations. I visited the graves of our own people and their faithful servants, and I examined into all the evidence that could be produced—quite enough to prove that the Peter Penwarne in whose house I was a guest was the true, direct, and, with his son, the only descendants of the exiled son of our house. He had a seal of our arms, impaling the heiress of Trederrick, who, as you will remember, brought the property you possess into our family, and with whose family the entail began; limited, as you can prove, to the sons who remained in England, and leaving out all mention of the one who had left the country; the entail having been made by that lady's husband, to whom, on her death, she had left the property, with power to dispose of it.

"All Peter Penwarne could say was that a tradition had come down to him which said that those arms represented the match from which he and his son descended. They had letters also from the Davies family to their relatives, which Peter had kept carefully, they having been a legacy to him from the last survivor. These letters are now in my possession. I kept up my friendship with this man, and with his son Hugh, my stepson's father, until Peter Penwarne died. In the meantime, I had been back to this country, I had exchanged into a new regiment, and I had gone to India. When there, in the midst of troubled times, I found Hugh Penwarne. I need not say how great was my surprise. We recognized each other. His abilities, which were very great, did not lie in the line of his father's business. It would have been impossible for Hugh to remain as a tiller of the soil. He had sold his property and come to Europe. He had joined a company of mercantile men, and put all that he possessed into the firm, being himself one of the managers. He was married to a young, beautiful, and very interesting girl, of good education, an orphan, and as desti-

tute of near relations as he was himself. There seemed to be reasonable hopes of our cousin making a fortune honestly, for he had industry, and a home to work for. He was also the father of a son who, when I first saw him at this time, was not then three months old. In another three months, by the unwise speculation of one member of the hard-working firm, for which all the others were responsible, ruin had come upon them. I was sent for, and I went. Hugh Penwarne had been struck down by a sudden illness, which in twelve hours proved fatal, and I had solemnly promised him, as far as I was able, to protect his wife and child.

"A very small sum of money had been invested for her. It produced less than seven shillings a week. But she worked in many ways; she was equal to doing a variety of useful things. She was educated; but beyond everything she was honest, and she would never take any money from me. Whether she overworked herself or not I do not know, but she fell ill, and I was ordered up the country on active service. We were to go into action. The season was unhealthy; the exertion expected of us very great. It was likely to be a time of death and disaster, and I was the only friend her child had in the world. She was so weak she could scarcely move from her chair; the boy, now about a year and a half old, was more than she seemed able to care for. I was greatly affected by her position; her gentleness, beauty, perseverance, and failing strength.

"There was death in my path as well as in hers. From hers, great care, such as ample means could supply, might keep off the woe,—what would become of the boy if left without her? I did as you know—I married her on the eve of going into battle. It was my only way of taking care of her. If I died she would have a pension; and I made my will, sent a duplicate off to England, and left all I possessed to Hugo, in case, in the coming action, I was killed. She married me for her child's sake. She knew better perhaps than I did that her days were to be very few. I left her in the charge of a friend, who had been one of the witnesses of my marriage and of my will; and in an hour I was gone. It gave me no sorrow when reflection came. I was glad always to have done as I did. She would have graced my position in life, and I knew I was never likely to be made, by any deed of hers, to repent of my hasty act.

"In seven months, time I was back to claim the boy, but

not my wife; she was alive—no more. She died within two hours of my return, thanking me with a voice that has blessed my life ever since. Her boy—Hugh Penwarne's boy—is my stepson, and my heir. He is eight-and-twenty years of age, and one of the most estimable and honourable of men. Peter, your sister and I are agreed in the love and interest we feel for him. If we are to live as those so nearly connected should live, you and yours must receive our Hugo as if he were our son. He is the last male heir of our family. He has thus claims of his own upon us. Every kindness shown to him I shall feel as a father should, every incivility shown to him I must resent as a father ought."

That was the letter written and sent to Trederrick before Colonel Penwarne again appeared among the ladies of his house. When he came among them he cried out with pleasure in his voice;

"Miss Teague! Miss Teague, welcome! You have been too long away. Don't you know that you bring holiday always?"

"Ah," she said, "but I have been too busy; and you never came to help me!"





CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE TREES.

Crowds of bees are busy with clover,
Crowds of grasshoppers skip at our feet,
Crowds of larks at their matins hang over
Thanking the Lord for a world so sweet.

JEAN INGELow.

"**I** WAS to have had bread and cream," said Marian Teague, "but I do not want to have it to-day, because I have had no dinner."

"What a horrible breach of discipline!" exclaimed Colonel Penwarne; "what can you have been doing?"

"I have been helping to make my curtains and to arrange a carpet. I have planned a fine covering for the hall, and cut out velvet and fringe for a shelf in a corner. I am so hungry. I came here expecting you to offer me cold chicken, or lamb and mint-sauce; only delicacies will suit an appetite just emerged from such an atmosphere of finery as has surrounded me for a week. And you all look quite surprised; and as if you had forgotten to be civil to me!"

Marian Teague, as they all called her, was now one of the happiest people in the world, and she looked the fact plainly, with a fountain of playfulness bubbling up when free from the restraints of the presence of strangers, and a most salutary breath of thanksgiving pervading it all, which made high and low, young and old, rich and poor, love her. Marian Teague had become everybody's property in some mysterious way. For eight-and-thirty years she had belonged to the place, the village, the people, the neighbours. Who was there in that little world who did not know and appreciate Marian Teague? Who was there who had not

felt her goodness, and longed for her return, and wondered with admiring love at her faithful life?

Now she stood, aged sixty, in the presence of friends whom for three generations she had blessed.

Life had gone lightly over her fair head, and time had brought nothing with it to harden her tender heart.

"I shall always be young," she said, with a sigh and a smile. "I have lived a life full of childhood. Jane, and Hugo, and Alice, and even you, Letty—though you don't belong to me; but once your father did—you may blame yourselves if I never look venerable. Even my hair won't grow grey, and I wear a cap because I am ashamed of it."

Underneath the babble of pleasant fancies with which she lightened other people's lives as well as her own, there was however a holy gravity. It was a gift with Marian Teague to know the height and depth, the measure and weight of thought and action, and to be able to count the cost of all that makes up life.

She had been always a safe friend and a wise defender; she had been called to be the protector of other people's lives.

In spite of the furnishing of the house, which had got transformed into a most charming cottage of gentility; notwithstanding open exhibitions of the fatigue and the hunger of which she, not quite without cause, complained, she had got back into that old place in the affections of the villagers, which she had first held when they called her "the Squire's lady-housekeeper;" and in the midst of all her cares she had been blessing them every day; and it was not entirely carpets and curtains, and rose-coloured velvet, that had kept her so long a time away from Coombe, but a mingling of overpowering circumstances connected with "the old widow Marchant's" crutches, and an intricate correspondence concerning the last days of the deaf and dumb son of the late chronicler Davies.

However, there at last she was, the sweet-voiced, soft-eyed, brown-haired Marian, whom no one, in spite of her many years, could have called an old woman, arrayed as she always was in silk that never rustled, but had a noiseless sweep which was peculiarly its own.

Marian Teague was like a fine musical chord, she was so thoroughly in tune, You could not have associated her with the smallest possibility of a jar. She was Love, Justice, and Mercy all in one.

"Why, here are my visions realized! Chairs under the laburnums—cold chicken and bread. Thank you, Colonel Penwarne. I shall show my gratitude by my actions. I always taught Jane that such was the right way."

"God bless you for all you taught her, and for the never-changing good you have been to me!"

In this way, at rare intervals, quite unexpectedly, Colonel Penwarne had thanked her sometimes. It took her so by surprise now that the tears jumped up to her eyes, and she said, as he led her out of the lawn, "Has anything happened?"

"No. Only I have had occasion, not unpleasantly, to look into my past life to-day. I never do it," he said, turning to her with a sweet grand smile, "without thanking you."

She answered only with another smile, and then Colonel Penwarne left her with his wife and the two girls under the trees.

It was the loveliest imaginable afternoon. There was the scent of sweetbrier, and the music of the bees, humming and busy among the flower-beds, in all their early gaiety of colour, as they spread themselves down the bank that edged the green turf, and got lost in the leafy tangle growing among the rocks that broke the steep slope of the ground before them.

Great arbutus trees rose on red interlacing stems, and gave density to the background against which the golden chains of the laburnums trembled in the light.

Mrs. Penwarne sat with her work in her lap; through Alice's fingers there passed a long strip of some delicate weaving of white leaves, and lines, and dots and flowers, which grew strangely to uninitiated eyes between her hands; Marian Teague sat eating her dinner; and Letty, with her great soft meditative looking eyes, seemed to watch the whole scene with a new-found interest in a life so very unlike her own.

Nothing at all approaching to what was going on at Coombe could by any possibility occur at Trederrick. She confessed in her heart that she was very glad she had come, that it was to her rest and recreation; and that she liked it all very much.

"Sing, Mrs. Penwarne—dear Jane, please to sing. Distinguished people, I remark, always eat to the sound of music. I claim my rights. You have been distinguishing me all your life, so there can be no excuse for refusing

now." Then to Letty, "Alice and her mother sing very well together, don't they?"

"I never heard them, so I do not know," said Letty.

"Ah! I forgot how short a time they have been there. I often forget how time passes. My life has been so much measured by events."

Then Marian Teague went on to tell Letty how she and her Aunt Jane had sung together at Trederrick in the old days, till Jane had surprised her brother by her proficiency; and Letty grew eager, asking questions. Where did they study? In what room was the pianoforte? Did they know that she had all the old school-books and story-books in which Aunt Jane's name had been written, in a bookcase made expressly for them in her own room?

This seemed to make a new tie between Mrs. Penwarne and her niece. She liked to have the place she had occupied in the beloved old home kept green. So when now Letty asked her to sing, and when Marian had spoken of the pleasure with which she had watched Alice's growing talent for music, and of how she had had her taught at school all the old songs with which her mother's girlhood had been familiar—when these things had been spoken of till the old life had been brought back, as far as it could be, to all of them, then Mrs. Penwarne sang "Flow on, thou shining river," and Letty's knitting lay untouched in her lap as she listened.

Very sweet and beautiful it was. And once more they lived through the too frequent fact, of the old realizing their own lives, and never giving a thought to the lives of the young.

Yet life is with the young.

The river had flowed past Mrs. Penwarne's "bower," according to the song, and had left its love gifts and its wreath of unfading flowers. She had listened to the message of love long ago; and Marian Teague had not been left without her share of promises and entreaties; and of all *that* they thought; and they forgot that the river still flowed, burthened still with sunny blossoms, speaking the same story, and yet not to them—to the unthought-of girlhood growing silently to maturity at their side—to Alice with her fair, tender loveliness, like the morning, bright and gay; and to Letty of the stronger nature, who could suffer without once asking for the luxury of tears.

There they stayed, under the trees. In her heart Letty

was saying incessantly, "How different this life from mine!" But she said it as she would have uttered any piece of knowledge, or spoken of any truth, which she was called upon only to accept.

She formed no wishes. She had led so strange a life as scarcely to know what was meant by wishing. She knew, however, as she sat there, more than she had ever known of what home might be—a home blessed by love, and dignified by a stainless constancy. Under the laburnums she was learning a great deal as to the happiness that might be in this world; and she would have been less than human had she not sometimes wondered whether or not such blissful days were in store for her.

But as soon as she was aware of her thoughts thus travelling into the future, she called them back. She never indulged in a waking dream. She had long determined, from a good instinct, never to travel beyond her daily life. She always honourably abstained from picturing to herself any possible life that must contrast forcibly with the life in which she lived. It seemed to her, in her generous love of her father, that to deny herself those imaginings was a part of her duty to him; and there is no doubt that, even in her daily life, she had her reward.

She could not help knowing that her father was an unhappy man, and she could not help guessing that his life had been, because of an ill-matched marriage, a failure. Neither could she help being aware of her mother's propensity to stamp the sweetness out of everybody's life and crush it in the dust beneath her feet. But she did not know why these things were, or in what they had had their beginnings. She would have refused all enlightenment, if any one could have offered it to her. To know how things were was her necessity. She could not become mentally and morally blind, deaf, and unreasonable; but to stop to inquire *why*, would have been to her pure heart undutiful and wrong—demoralizing to herself, and unchildlike to them—loss every way.

Different as her father and mother were from each other, and very different as they were in their treatment of her, she could give to both the worship of a profound respect, and the singular homage of a most fastidious fidelity. And this it seems necessary at this point of our story to dwell upon, as many things, some good and some evil, were suffered of Letty in consequence.

No wonder that she perceived so soon and so clearly the great difference between Alice's life and her own. Mrs. Penwarne, in the vigour of her age, in her full beauty, and at the very pinnacle of success, was so much a companion to her daughter that their intercourse had a sort of sisterly equality in it, very sweet to see. Occasionally Marian Teague felt that there lurked some sort of disadvantage to Alice in the fact of her father and mother being such lovers still. It looked sometimes as if, now that Alice had ceased to be a child, she was left on the banks of her river a little too much alone. There is no doubt that she would have felt the want of that love which is above all companionship, the devotion that mothers feel, and make their children comprehend, if she had not had something which, so far, had been all she wanted, and had kept her from knowing anything of the one thing that Marian feared about.

This *something* had always been in her life. It was Hugo.

Colonel Penwarne had seen Hugó grow into a necessity. He had liked it. He had given him to Alice in his heart, and he was glad to see them necessary, as he thought, to each other. And Alice, without any anxiety, took what she found; giving a love beyond measure to her sisterly mother, and a worship different, but not less loving, to her hero of a father. As to Hugo, he was theirs and hers. As to the future, it was like one vast playground to this gentle soul inexperienced in evil.

While Letty lived in the past and present, holding tightly the reins of her imagination, and turning away from all contemplation of the future, Alice gazed onward into sunny years with undazzled eyes. Her spirit was free.

The girl who lived in the sunshine could not see clearly into Letty's colourless life.

She could read Lady Judith's history easily enough; Lady Judith advanced herself into Alice's light, and there made most self-asserting exhibitions of all her several peculiarities by turns. Alice had already learnt most of them by heart, and could argue with tolerable certainty as to all that remained. But she felt quite differently when she thought of Letty. The eyes accustomed to the sun-light could not penetrate into the other's shade.

And though Alice thought she could see quite through Lady Judith's character, it may be at once declared that she was considerably mistaken. The glitter of her own sunny skies had dazzled her youthful sight; and her own ignorance

of grief, and all evil things, mislead her. There stood Lady Judith, the last of an aristocratic house, without father or mother, brother or sister: transplanted by marriage into ungenial companionship; her son dead, her daughter absorbed into another person's life, and, whatever had been her story, left in her own home absolutely without sympathy—alone.





CHAPTER VIII.

MORE PEOPLE.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.—KEATS.

UTILL they were under the trees. Letty never forgot those hours.

"Who is it?" said Mrs. Penwarne. Some one was coming carefully down the high rhododendron bank which made the shelter and shade of the corner where they were sitting. "It is dangerous, Hugo."

"Indeed I have not broken a branch or touched a flower. They are magnificent up at the top."

The bank was extremely steep, very high, and studded with huge craggy rocks. The lawn on which they were assembled had been, long years back, cut out of the hill near the summit of which, surrounded by protecting trees, the house had been built; and the crag-path that made a direct way to Trederrick, was a natural continuation of this rocky step, where, in among the granite, the deep deposits of peat offered the soil they most rejoiced in to a large class of flowering shrubs. They made the glory of Coombe.

But when Mrs. Penwarne said to Hugo that it was dangerous, she had not been thinking of the shrubs, but of himself. However, Hugo was one of those persons who never associate either danger or difficulty with anything they have to do; and so, when Mrs. Penwarne explained her meaning, he answered simply, "Ah, yes; it was a bad example, so I won't do it again."

Alice looked up at him with approving eyes. "You will be wanted to take Letty down the crag-path," she said.

"I was promised, Miss Teague," remarked Letty, not looking up from her knitting.

"Then I can take care of Miss Teague," said Hugo, "and see her safe home. Please come too, Alice; and then you

can take care of me, so that I shall not have to walk back by myself, and we can leave Mrs. Penwarne to take care of Coombe and your father."

"Very well arranged," said Mrs. Penwarne with a touch of gravity which told Hugo she did not mean him to speak in a style of banter, and that she feared he had not forgiven Lady Judith.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I will try not to do it again."

Letty looked up in sudden surprise.

"Miss Drake does not know us yet," said Hugo. "Mrs. Penwarne is displeased; and it was I who occasioned it. We have a sort of secret signal society among us. If Mrs. Penwarne speaks half a tone lower than her usual key when addressing me, I know I am naughty, and confess it at once."

This time Mrs. Penwarne only raised her eyes and looked at the naughty boy, and he said hurriedly, "Indeed, I did not mean it."

Letty laughed. Alice looked at her with a quiet smile; and Miss Teague said, "Ever since Mrs. Penwarne took the reins of government, we have all been spoilt."

"My dear Marian," said that lady, "what is it all about?"

No answer was given, for, marshalled through the morning-room, and out on the grass by the window, came, as Dickson announced, "Mrs. Carteray, Mrs. Baynard, Mr. Carteray." The whole party rose up and went to meet the new-comers.

It was Mrs. Carteray's first visit to Mrs. Penwarne.

"I could not come before," she said; "I hope you knew that I was away."

"Yes, your sister told me;" and Mrs. Penwarne gave her hand to Mrs. Baynard, who looked very bright and pretty. She was, in fact, very much pleased to see Letty Drake apparently on such good terms with her cousins and her aunt—"that poor dear Letty," as she called her in her heart.

Hugo and Cecil Carteray immediately began talking together, for they had met many times in their boyhood, since Mrs. Carteray had become the mistress of her father's house, and when Hugo had spent his holidays with Miss Teague at Coombe.

They had not met since Hugo had gone to India with his regiment, but they had not forgotten each other. They were just the same age, and they spoke as friends.

"My dear Carteray!" exclaimed Hugo.

"Well, it is pleasant to feel that I should have known you anywhere," said Cecil, "though you are such a fine fellow."

"I am not taller than you are. I may weigh more."

"I am five feet eleven and a half," said Cecil.

"Then I beat you by quarter of an inch. Are you hero for some time?"

"For all the time I can spare—two months, perhaps. Then away, then back again. I make Marsland my country home. Sir Harry is so good to me. I believe he thinks I am really his son sometimes. He is kinder than I can describe; and my mother there—stepmother, you know—is the best woman in the world."

"Not quite," said Hugo, laughing. "I could run her hard; but we are both of us in supreme luck. Fancy me!" he exclaimed with a smile. "By the bye, where's Fred?"

"Still away. He has three years more before he can get back. But he is well, and an excellent fellow. How good Colonel Penwarne was to him! You are both heroes in Sir Harry's eyes; and not unreasonably," he added, grasping Hugo's hand, as he turned away to speak to Alice.

He spoke to Letty last of all.

More chairs were brought, for everybody preferred the laburnums to the house. The talk grew fast and full of former days. Mrs. Penwarne asked after Sir Harry, and heard of his good-hearted kindness, his rheumatism, and his merry messages to her and her husband. She had, too, to ask after Lady Mary, and her husband, Mr. Cleverleigh. And what kind of girl was Liza?—and was Cleverleigh Hall such a very fine place? Did not they ever come to Lerrins—Lerrins with the spreading lawn, the meadows by the river, and the grand gigantic elms, and monarch oaks? Mrs. Penwarne remembered Lerrins, and liked the place, with vivid recollections of bantam fowls and fan-tail pigeons, better than she had ever liked its mistress.

Lady Mary was an invalid, she heard. Mr. Cleverleigh was charming; Liza a lovely, spoilt, independent, spirited young personage. They came to Lerrins at intervals. "They roughed it there with fourteen servants two years ago," said Mrs. Baynard.

Mrs. Carteray wondered over Mrs. Penwarne's remembrances of herself, as the tall, gaunt, shy girl who had been brought to Frederrick occasionally with a view to their being friends.

"You used to be so kind to me, Miss Teague," she said "I was always afraid of Mrs. Penwarne in her girlhood; she used to look at me with such quiet eyes, so critically, as I thought. Afterwards, when I was in London, old Lady Dynham was very kind to me. She used to take me out with her, and she got me so many pleasant invitations. In return she expected me to talk of you, and she used to send for my father, who had never done with his praises. She liked to hear all we could tell her of Frederick, and all we knew of your life. Where is Miss d'Antoine—you used to call her Desirée?"

All this time Letty Drake was listening with eager ears. Here was the old life before she was born—Aunt Jane's life—coming out in a series of sketches from human hands, good and true, and ready lips.

She heard that Desirée d'Antoine was married, and that when her relation, Mrs. Clarkson died she had left what had been called her "little tenement" to Desirée.

"Then, on Mrs. Clarkson's death," explained Miss Teague, "last year, Desirée sold the cottage, with its garden and field, and sloping orchard—the great arbutus tree, and all—and then I bought it," she added, triumphantly.

Miss Teague, saying this, looked with a sort of inquiring glance at Letty; but Letty's eyes were on her work. She did not catch the look, but she knew very well how much in her mother's conduct towards Miss Teague the fact just declared accounted for.

Lady Judith had wished her husband to buy the pretty little property. Of course everything in the village, and as far as possible around it, ought to belong to him; but he had refused.

Again and again she had declared her will, only to be defeated. At last she had written, giving her own orders for its purchase to their steward, and he had written back to say that he did not think Mr. Frederick could spare the money for it. This announcement had raised one of those storms, not loud, but long-enduring, from which never, through all life, would there be any real and entire recovery.

Lady Judith had been insulted.

But Miss Teague bought the cottage and land, and added to it three more fields, and a small house, by which the whole place was raised to the title and dignity of "The Cot Farm." And Mrs. Ferris, the widowed sister of Chronicler Davies, had immediately become her tenant.

Mrs. Carteray heard all this, not as news, for the Baynards had told her, and Sir Harry Goodman had already sent messages of good omen, and gifts of fruit and flowers, as a neighbourly welcoming of Miss Teague, but she listened with great interest, for she heard with the facts the manner of their occurrence.

"Old Lady Dynham left me the money," said Miss Teague. "She was very kind to my mother, and more than friendly to me; she was pleased to leave me a legacy of kind words too, which were as good as gold. So here I am among old friends, and many dear associations, quite a well-to-do person in my old age."

"Old age!" The repetition came in chorus.

"Oh, I have done; you are laughing at me," she said.

And still Letty held down her pretty head, and kept her eyes on her knitting pins, and "How much I have learnt!" she thought within her heart. Then she whispered to Alice, "It is time to go. I *must* go now."

"Come, Hugo, we must take Alice home. We are obliged to go, Mrs. Carteray. Will you excuse us?"

"You are going down the crags, are you?" said Cecil. "I will go with you. I will then go to the Vicarage, and you can keep Mrs. Carteray till I come," he said to Mrs. Baynard.

There was a general standing up, some hurried words of good-bye from Letty, and then the young people were gone down among the tangled shrubs, and flowers, and trees, and the elder ladies went back into the house.

Somehow, without contrivance or intention, Cecil Carteray led the way with Letty, and Hugo came on after them helping Alice.

The crag-path was very slippery sometimes. The spines of the firs made a carpet there, and through this dry summer-like spring they had not decayed, but lay polished in a treacherous beauty.

"Take care, take care," Cecil was saying. "Place your foot against mine; this is the steepest turn of all; pray come slowly!"

But *we* can't come slowly," said Hugo. "Alice is unmanageable. Let us pass you—there; stand still on that ledge of rock and let us come by."

They obeyed, and like two goats the others passed them. Hugo was out of breath with fright, but he kept hold of Alice's hand, and they were in the broad walk at the bottom

of the steep in a wonderfully short space of time. Then Alice looked her companion in the face.

"Thank you," she said. "Hugo, what made you—tell me exactly what made you angry with Lady Judith—quick—speak quickly before they come."

"Oh, I was cross. Lord and Lady Dynham are staying there, and Lord Belton; you know they came yesterday."

"Yes; they came for a month. They are to take her niece Sophy Cereseau away."

"Bother Sophy Cereseau!"

"Go on, please. What vexed you?"

"Lady Judith vexed me because she was humbugging Belton. He is a very good lad," said this military patriarch of this youth of twenty-one, "and she wants him for your cousin Letty. The whole thing was so transparent, and he was such a fool."

"No. Why shouldn't he like it?"

"He has not seen her for seven years. And he would not be silly to like her; but he is worse than silly to be put upon it by Lady Judith. The whole of the first half of luncheon was occupied in contriving for Letty—I beg her pardon—Miss Drake—to ride out with that boy, and the last part of that meal was embittered by my helping her not to do it. Miss Drake had made up her mind to spend this afternoon with you. She is as patient as a martyr—it's perfectly disgusting," said Hugo.

"Why should she not ride with him? Lord Belton is a very nice boy, and a kind of a cousin."

"Oh, I know the pedigree perfectly. His grandfather was your mother's half-uncle—and he, by some other division or subdivision, is your second cousin and her second cousin, or would have been if that dear, original old Lady Dynham—who was very kind to me when I was a schoolboy, and had quite the right ideas of Christmas gifts and Easter offerings, and made holiday for me in London, bless her!—if she had been the mother of the heir as well as the mother of the daughter, Lady Jane, in yonder churchyard—bless *her* too, for being the mother of Mrs. Penwarne."

"Now, recover your breath," said Alice, smiling, "and tell me more about your vexation. I think the cause, as it stands at present, remarkably small."

"Is it not enough to see an old woman like Lady Judith——"

"She isn't old,"

"Well, then, *any* woman thoroughly disgusting, persecuting her daughter, and toadying the young Lord? She would be his ruin in three months. He could not stand it, though he is a good lad, and has as much brains as his head can conveniently carry. I know him well. But I gave Letty her holiday, and conquered Lady-Judith. How she hated me!"

"Now, Hugo, you are wrong. How slow Letty is! But tell me quickly, what did you do?"

"I said that for them to ride together would be quite delightful—*so* delightful; *I would ride too.*"

"Oh, Hugo!" Then Alice laughed.

"I insisted on it. I took Lady Judith's part. I talked to Miss Drake confidentially. Then Lady Judith thought the day too warm; and advised us all to stay at home. But I got Fairy, and I rode the boy out, and freed that poor child to come up to you. Then I got home in time to take her back."

"I hope she has been happy," said Alice.

"She is happy *now*," said Hugo. And as they looked up the path, there, on a safe standing ground, was the girl of whom they were speaking looking down into Cecil Carteray's face.

He was talking very quietly as it seemed, but so as to have gained her whole attention.

The rest lasted two or three minutes, and then they came on very steadily and silently. those watchers thought; only there are things in people's lives which are not best said by words.

Hugo looked at Alice, and the girl blushed like a rose-bud.

"Come on," he said, "we can wait for them by the garden-door."

There at the door that opened into the walled fruit-garden at the back of Trederrick they all stood and said "Good-bye."

"I must go this way," said Cecil, and he turned and walked quickly up the broad drive, which was the carriage way to the church and the village.

Letty opened the door with her own latch-key. "Thank you, Alice," she said; then, in a whisper, "I have had a happy afternoon—*very* happy." That was all. She went through the door, and left them standing in the shade of the pine trees, alone.

"I wonder if she likes Carteray," said Hugo.

"Does he like her?" This seemed to Alice to be the more serious question.

"He is a man of strong purpose, and desperately clever."

"And Lady Judith is very fond of him."

"What a humbug she is!" Hugo could not get that idea out of his mind, and it seemed to fill it to the exclusion of all other notions.

"It is an innocent sort of fault; scarcely a fault—a mere meanness," said Alice.

"It's a lie incarnate," said Hugo, fiercely; "and it saps the truth out of other people's lives."





CHAPTER IX.

AT HOME.

The human soul craves something that endures.

WORDSWORTH.

MRS. BAYNARD and her sister sat waiting for Cecil. They talked of those whom they had left.

It was a genuine pleasure to get Mrs. Penwarne back among them, Mrs. Carteray said; she wished Eleanor Baynard could remember the old times when Miss Teague lived and ruled at Trederrick—"but you were only seven years old," said the elder sister, "and Freddy was four. It was when Lady Mary lived with us, which was a trying time. I so well remember how Jane looked when my father took me there in my first black frock after our dear mother's death," she went on softly.

Mrs. Baynard's little girl was playing in the room where the sisters were gossiping over a cup of tea, and Mrs. Carteray lowered her voice to a whisper—"My father left me there while he went to a magistrates' meeting at Newton; and Jane was so silent, almost speechless; it frightened me I remember, and I looked at Miss Teague, who was quite natural, and took not the smallest notice. Then when we were sent out to walk, Jane led me through the walled garden, and we came up the drive to this place; not to the house, but to the church. I can even now recollect the sun-light lying on the graves. She took me by the hand, and walked to where her mother's and father's, and little brother's grave, made a group, all blossoming there with myrtle flowers; and she turned quickly and kissed the black crape strings of my bonnet, and then my lips; on which we walked away. I was crying. But Jane did not speak. She was a girl, then, so odd, so full of unuttered things. How good it must have been for her to get into a world of

love and action. People said she was very clever, but that she would have broken her heart if she had been sent to school."

"How handsome she is!" exclaimed Mrs. Baynard. "And she keeps so young. In spite of India, and absences, and voyages, and changes of fifty kinds, and parting from Alice, she looks so young, and so well. Happiness is a very good thing for people. I hope my girl may be to me what Alice is to her. But so few people could be like Mrs. Penwarne. I am quite fascinated by her—and as to her husband; that man is a hero. We can't help being proud of him. He is so grand, I am exalted when I talk to him; so good, it makes me persevering and strong; so kind, I am comforted. Oh, I do love a good grand man—and I really think Captain Penwarne is very like him."

"We live in a world of good men," said Mrs. Carteray, with rather a provoking smile. "Your husband is not so bad; and my boy Cecil——"

"Eustace is perfect. You are cold hearted and ungrateful. I hope Cecil won't turn out ill, in his eight-and-twentieth year, to punish you. Don't you know that praise is thanksgiving?"

"What a time you have been!" said Mrs. Carteray to her stepson, who just then made his appearance.

"Time enough to rest the horses and give them leisure to enjoy their feed. Have you no tea for me?"

"Indeed, my dear Cecil, you will keep my father waiting dinner; please ring the bell."

"Well, I have been a little forgetful. Indeed, I *quite* forgot the hour. I am ready, and I don't want anything more than a glass of water."

"Did you go into the house?"

"No. Lady Judith was out."

Mrs. Baynard looked away with a smile. What could make Cecil like Lady Judith? And he certainly did. It was the oddest thing in the world.

Mrs. Baynard was very fond of Cecil Carteray. Cecil was the younger by several years, but great strength of character, education from a very early age—as much as he could bear—and now a long knowledge of the world of men, as well as the world of books—the great teaching voice of the living, and the silent, solitude-filling wisdom of the dead—these things had given age to Cecil Carteray, and the standing-alone that had come to him even in boyhood had made him singularly wise.

Great good or great evil must have come to Cecil from the circumstances of his life; and it had been *good*.

He had been brought up to work. Brain labour had been fixed on as his way of life. It had, however, come to him with such ease as to make it a task of not too much difficulty. His gifts lay in that way, and genius crowned the labour that so wisely wrought.

He was successful and admired.

He had passed, too, through the one great danger of his life safely.

His father had died just before his coming of age; and he had scarcely recovered from the blow when he found himself the master of eight hundred a year.

"Exactly enough to ruin him," and "he is a strong man if he can carry that burthen without a fall into the mire." Such had been Sir Harry Goodman's commentary on what some people called Cecil's luck. But when Sir Harry saw the youth unaltered, pursuing his profession, and using his money for his own and other's good, he made him welcome to Marsland, and treated him as a son. So everybody respected Cecil, and Mrs. Baynard even looked up to him. But there still remained the mystery of his liking for Lady Judith.

"Everybody," said Eustace Baynard to his pretty wife that day, "probably, has a different opinion of Lady Judith. She is not liked by people in general. She is not popular. Well, everybody can't be popular——"

"But, Eustace, I think that everybody can be *true*."

He looked at her gravely. She was very much in earnest; and, if her face did not deceive terribly, *she* was as true a little woman as ever lived. "It may be more difficult to some than to others," he said.

"Yes; but every one *can* be true. I feel *that* deep down somewhere! too deeply is that feeling rooted ever to be torn up. I should never be happy again if I could be deprived of that deep-rooted belief. Everybody *can* be true. She is *not* true. By little and little she has got herself to that state—she is not true. All perfection, all pure motive, is gone out of her life. She is in bondage to a life that she has made for herself. She can't be free, because she is false."

"Well," said Mr. Baynard, "women know women, I suppose, better than we do. I think your theory is good; but I don't want you to apply it to your neighbour's life, or

to try Lady Judith too precipitately. We may not have all the witnesses, you know."

Mrs. Baynard liked her husband all the better for his caution; but she never changed her opinion.

Letty had got home with a new light in her life, Oh! was it *true*?—was that *true*?

And where had this light come from, and when had it dawned on Letty's soul?

It had come from Cecil Carteray. There had been a magical moment as they stood together in the pathway down the crags. Scarcely a word had been said, and only one word had Letty uttered; but the light had dawned, and there had suddenly come up above the range of rocky mountains that seemed to encircle her life and keep it in perpetual shade, a glorious sun that made all things new.

What had been said? She really did not know. What had been felt? Strong, honest, human love. She had felt that Cecil loved her—had loved her long—had loved from his youth, and had loved no one else. In that supreme moment of power she knew perfectly well that all life would be according to what on that moment might follow. Life had begun. The future would date from that point in the present. So she was speechless.

Two great tears witnessed for her.

"Are you sorry?" he asked.

"No." Then she darted forward, and he kept by her side. Then they reached the broad road where Hugo and Alice stood. Then Letty passed through the garden door, and locked them out.

But some new spirit had entered into her and exalted her—given her strength, hope, a holy pride, a wonderful peace. To be loved by a good man, what an honour, what a taking of rank it was! It was, as she stood there by the blossoming fruit-trees on the brown brick walls, as if she wanted nothing more in this world. If things could stand still for ever, until death, she would be satisfied. The last ten minutes had been full enough of good to bless the remainder of her days. She had found that which the human heart craves after, the thing that endures, the love of a man strong, good, and gracious—what it is good for a woman to have. And she, a gentle daughter of Eve, stood in a garden that had become another Eden, and thought of this with a deep solemnity upon her soul. She thought and gave thanks.

True woman as Letty was, she thought the thoughts of the true. She could never, on such a matter, have listened to doubt. She could not after years of service, or any accumulation of trial, have believed any more firmly in Cecil Carteray than she did at that moment. Nature, education, and self-knowledge had united to make her feel thus.

Her father had once said to her that to be companionable was one of the best of a good woman's attributes. The truth came back to her now.

Adam, the first created, was alone in Eden, he had said; woman was never alone there. It was not good for man to be alone, but woman was not even allowed to try.

The thing had come which was the completion of life, and it raised her, blessed her, crowned her. She walked with a changed step into the house; not with steps winged with joy, but steadied by promise. The future had been revealed to her; she, by her own acceptance, had confirmed it—she had given herself away.

Lady Judith, and Lord and Lady Dynham had returned from their drive. They were standing in the library, looking out of that great window away from which in the old time Jane had had the shrubs removed, and where they could gaze far down the gully upon the sea lying like a silver lake, quivering in the sun.

Lady Judith had not asked for her daughter; she knew where she had been.

"Have you seen your father?"

"No, mamma."

Lady Judith started. There was a tone in her child's voice that struck her. She did not speak; her husband came in at the moment.

"I want to speak to you before dinner, Judith," he said.

"You must be quick. It is almost time to dress."

"Directly then." He too had spoken with a strange voice; she looked at him almost frightened.

He spoke for a moment to Lord Dynham; asked Sophy Ceresau if she had enjoyed her drive; never waited for an answer, but made a sign to his wife to follow him from the room.

"Well, what is it?" she said, when they got into the hall.

He walked on to a seat on the shady side of that terrace with the parapet wall where his mother's flower-beds had been, and said, "Read that." He put Colonel Penwarne's letter into her hand. She read it very attentively.

"Well," she said indifferently, "we knew all that, didn't we?" She, in truth, felt very strongly on the subject, but she did not choose to let Peter see it.

"We knew it; but not quite in this formal, business-like manner; and you see that last sentence. Arthur dictates to us what our behaviour is to be. I make no objection. I like Hugo. He is a very fine character, and an accomplished gentleman. I am quite ready to accept him as the heir of our name and estates, but——" he hesitated.

"Go on," she said in a hard voice.

"I am afraid of you."

"I declare I never heard of anything so unreasonable. What quarrel have I with Captain Penwarne? He is not a very civil sort of man, as far as my experience goes. He is self-asserting, I think. But I have no quarrel with him. When he was a great active boy, and no one knew anything of his destiny, I certainly did not choose him to be here on intimate terms with Letty; now——"

"Stop," said Peter Drake. "Now, Judith, the best thing that could happen would be that they should marry." Lady Judith stood still; she felt quite stunned. "It would secure the property to our child," said Peter. "Come what will, whichever died first, Arthur or I, Letty would have the property."

"I think," said Lady Judith, in a calm voice, "I think she had better go back into your mother's family, and make Dynely her own. Belton admires her."

"Belton's a boy. Very inferior, as a human creature, to Letty."

"I don't know what you mean. I know that Letty will lose this home if you die before Colonel Penwarne, and I think she had best secure another."

"It would embitter my life to feel sure she would leave this county and our own people."

"Then it is lucky that you can't feel sure. I feel that people should make sure of what they can get; Lady Dynham would like it."

"I should not like it," said Peter.

Lady Judith stood still and looked at him. He shivered under her cold eye. He stood just where he remembered Jane standing, in her black garments, after their father's funeral. He had a rich treasure of affection in his heart now for his sister, who loved him well. It had grown with his years, and been strengthened in his adversity; it had

put forth flowers and fruit in her happiness and prosperity. She had been the one topic of romance between himself and Letty, and he had no wish stronger in his heart than that Letty should be like her. It all came to him as he suffered that strange little shudder under his wife's scrutinizing eye.

"You mean to say that you would prevent, if you could, so good a match as Letty's with Lord Belton?" she inquired, in a tone of the deepest astonishment.

"Unless she can tell me on her solemn word that her heart pines for him—that such a marriage is necessary to her happiness, he shall not have her."

"Good gracious; and when your death may deprive her—and me—of so much."

"My mind is made up," he said. In his heart he added that beggary itself must be preferable to a mismatched marriage, but he did not say it.

"Then I suppose we must pray for you to live," she said, scoffingly. "But you must have money somewhere."

"Without the entailed estates I should be poor. I told you when we married not to calculate on the income then produced by the mine. We were very extravagant; and there were other things," he said, slowly. "Even now we could lay by, if—— Will you give up the house in London, Judith?—for Letty's sake?"

"No. - For the twentieth time, no. I do her the greater good by keeping it. It is my own by inheritance. I have of my own enough to prevent its being an expense to you. And, though you will not tell me, you *must* have laid by money."

"No. I have paid the twelve thousand pounds which was due to Jane from the estate, and the interest, during the time that it was not paid. I paid into their banker's hands five hundred a year, until I had made up the whole sum. I sold the Gwilter-bay farm to make it up last year. It was her right."

"And now if you die first they will take the very ground we tread upon."

"Don't go over the old grievance," he said.

She would not listen. "It has all been so mismanaged. Oh, if my son had lived——!"

"Don't, don't," he said pleadingly. He had gone through that kind of thing again and again, till he was quite worn out.

"Let the thing be as I say. A mother has ways of managing matters, and they would like it I am sure. Let Hugo marry her. She would be happy. He has plenty in him."

Lady Judith recovered her composure, but she would not speak.

"Give Letty her chance," he said. Still she was speechless. "I shall write to Arthur. I shall take his letter very kindly. I shall say that I wish such an event might be possible in the future."

"It is time to go in," said Lady Judith.

"I shall show you my letter before sending it. I will not send it without your consent. But if I send it——" then their eyes met.

"Why should you say anything about it?" she asked, making a final effort, antagonistic towards Coombe.

"Partly because I should like to do something towards bringing about an event which would make my life or death indifferent—also because it may keep Hugo from thinking of anything else."

"Very well," she said coldly, and walking away.

That day several neighbouring friends came to dinner. It was a gentleman's party. Letty had nothing more difficult to do than to talk to pretty Sophy Ceresan.

Towards Lord Belton she had always felt like an elderly lady. She had scarcely seen him for seven years, and yet she had always felt older, if not wiser, than this man who thought it quite a good joke to call her his cousin. She had no comprehension of what he was like, or what he wanted, or what he was going to do in the world; and she caught herself talking to him of the books in her father's library, as if he were a child.

This night Lady Judith watched her, and thought of her as perhaps she had never thought before—the result was favourable to Peter.

"She is so oddly unconscious, what with reading Latin and Greek, and learning mathematics," she said, in the privacy of her own room. "I suppose her father is right. I don't believe she would marry Lord Belton. Ah, if that boy——!" and she burst into a flood of tears.

Backwards and forwards, amidst hope and fear, this woman had led her life; in a desperation of hope when she married, in a fever of fear when the boy lay ill; in a passion of humiliation when his green grave rose by the side of

those others in the church, where the flowers still grew. Bent on self-assertion, fighting for an impossible freedom, trampling angrily under foot everything that lay in the path of her absolute determination; caring for herself and despising herself; vexed because she could not be happy, and revenging her trouble on both husband and child, this woman had one sad tender spot in her soul, which, if she could have knelt in submission, might have taken all the hardness out of her heart and brought her peace.

Perhaps it had been sent to do that great thing; but if so, she had not put the trial of her son's death to its proper use. She rocked herself backwards and forwards in an agony of mind, as bitter memories rose and shook her, like a tree in a storm. Her heart cried out—"Ah, if *he* had lived, if *he* had lived!"

She thought that no one remembered the boy but herself. Almost she was right. She was jealous and angry at the forgetfulness that had come to Peter through the love that he had for his daughter.

"He never thinks, he never feels. I am the only one who suffers;" so she cried in their anger, so she judged in her pride, as she isolated herself from all who belonged to her.

It was hard work that night to show an unmoved face to Peter when he came to her with the note he had written to Colonel Penwarne.

"Don't read it all," she said; "what have you said as to Hugo?"

"Only this."

Then he read. "I admire Hugo for his own sake. I find no fault with anything you propose in his favour. I wish you would make known to him that Lady Judith and I desire to welcome him as your son if he chooses to accept such a welcome. I only wish he could be my son too, and that it might ever enter his mind to consult Letty on the subject. I should not then fear to die before you, as I do now, sometimes."

"You have been plain enough," she said, forcing a smile.

"I could not be otherwise if I entered on the subject at all."

"So like you; so business-like."

"Shall I send it?"

"Oh, yes."

The next morning the note lay on Colonel Penwarne's breakfast-table.

Lady Judith had gone sighing to bed.

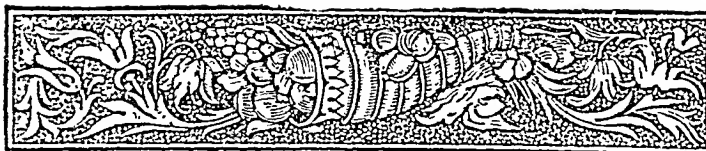
She had tried through all her married life to stand alone, and she could not do it. She had tried to stand alone and make her own life, and not care for others; and she had only beaten her feet sore in the rough way that no man had smoothed from her, and grown hard under the blast from which no man had sheltered her.

And yet times came when the woman's soul cried out in its loneliness; and then she always turned to the memory of the boy who had been taken from her. The human soul craves something that endures; and her cry came—it was a false cry nevertheless—"Oh, had *he* lived; *he!*"

The histories of our lives are never all written by daylight. The sun's rays reveal us, but the silent stars hear our confessions. Peter Drake, in his lonely room high up, where the tower rose, even in his chamber surrounded by his books, came forth from the adjoining dressing-closet, where the lamp burned faintly, into the balmy blessed air which filled the sleeping-room from the window which stood open, and let in the silence, marked by the regular washing of the far-off waves. He looked out for a moment on the great ocean spreading away to the meeting sky; on the still trees, on their peaceful shadows, broken by the glittering stone of the low parapet, and painting with strange dark blots the low thick-flowering plants in the garden beds his mother had planned, and which were still preserved in the forms she had left, for her dear memory's sake.

"Better to die as she died," said Peter, "than to live Judith's life." Then a pause, and then a few words, scarcely spoken—sighed forth rather—rough and rude, but not the less true for being so very unlike the usual utterances of Peter Drake—"I behaved infernally ill to her," he said.





CHAPTER X.

QUESTIONS.

Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

JOHN FLETCHER.

LETTY, too, wept many tears that night. What had happened to her? What had been said that she should feel so changed? It was strange that the thing that had come had been so nearly wordless. It was still stranger, perhaps, that she had never paused in her life to ask for it; and yet, now that it *had* come, she knew that it was the fulfilment of a woman's destiny—that to be loved was the thing meant for her, that its name was Happiness.

But the closing of a day of happiness is always subduing. Look back, reader, on your life, and confess that this is true; it is always subduing, sometimes even sad.

Letty had got the woman's treasure, but the unutterable joy of its finding was gone. Then, too, there was felt to be something perilous in the fact that all future life now, in its weal or woe, would depend on that one moment of time which was passed.

He had made her understand that he loved and had long—always—loved her. He had caused her to know, she scarcely knew how, that she had been the secret influence of his life. Everything had been because of her. The education that her father delighted in, the success that the world praised, the contentedness in his dull life during holiday time at Marsland, which made Sir Harry Goodman thankful—it had been *her* doing; for everything had been for her sake. And the great mystery of his value to Lady Judith, of her friendship for him, of his unaffected tender-

ness to her, had quite disappeared. He had promised in his heart to be a son to that woman; and something unspoken, but passing like an electric message from one longing heart to another, had obliged her to like him, had constrained her to take pleasure in him, and to be glad when he was by.

Letty sat tearfully dwelling on all this in a state of supreme happiness. He had seen her tears, at the remembrance of which she smiled now; he had said, "Are you sorry?" And she had answered "No." It had taken but a point of time to say that word, but it had become the starting-point of a new life. A *new* life? Had Letty ever lived till now?

Generally youth is a restless time, full of inquiry. A child inquires for ever. We are all familiar enough with the perpetual "But why?"—we should be alarmed if we missed it. And youth inquires as much and over a wider field, only, having learnt something from prudence, it is less lavish of speech. But often life to the young is a wonder-world, where they live throbbing with hopeful fancies, and heaving with emotion.

As our lives go on, experience is gained. Then comes the great truth that all our questions will be answered, but not now; and the heart satisfied, but not here. Then repose comes; the sooner it comes the better. Guardian angels bring us the gift; and those who accept and treasure it find also the gift of patience, and they learn to wait.

Time works away. We become the lookers-on; we live more in other people's lives than in our own. Our own life has become regulated by habits and ruled by necessities—we are growing old!

Now this sort of growing old had already come to Letty Drake. And into this life ruled by necessities had come the knowledge of Cecil Carteray's love.

But for Letty Drake to have felt this sensation of age was unnatural. It was only not actually *bad*, because her life had been a life of duty, and she had not worn herself out by kicking against necessities.

She had taken refuge with her father; and though to have to escape into the shadow of this refuge from her life of pain was a misfortune, the refuge was a safe one, and happy in its way.

So, when Cecil Carteray's love dawned on her, it was like giving her the sweetness of youth; it was a leading her forth

into life, a May-queen crowned with flowers—there was a world before her, all her own, of which she had not guessed, and Aunt Jane would not now be in her experience the happiest wife on earth.

There are those who have led lives which are famine-stricken—hungry hearts, who yet have not comprehended their pain completely, because they have never tasted the food that enriches life. Letty's life had been among these meagre days from childhood practising habitual abstinence, and yet growing strong on her Spartan food, and never knowing anything of what life ought to be, or guessing much at what it might be, till she saw Alice at Coombe.

But it must be understood that Letty had not been unhappy. Her life was her life—accepted, even enjoyed; for acceptance makes peace, and in acceptance is freedom as well as rest.

She lived under a hard law; with a father and mother who had never loved each other as husbands and wives should love. And worse than that, her parents were antagonistic.

Poor Peter Drake! a new generation had arisen, and seen that he *could not understand*. The old cry that had come from his sister's heart had not done echoing at Trederrick.

And Lady Judith led an angry life, and she had led it almost from the first. She had soon found out that he couldn't understand. But she had, by persevering and vehement instructions, confirmed both by word and deed, *made him* understand at last, and then he had rebelled. He had been hard on her, no doubt, though she had not deserved tenderness, till the son on whom so much depended lay dead. Then the whole story of her wrongs burst upon her; yet a great sympathy had done much peace-making in Peter's heart, and if Lady Judith could have accepted what he would have given, their lives might have gone on in a better way.

But she could not. It was not revenge, "the abject pleasure of an abject mind," that got the better of her, yet she took to punishing Peter for the things that were past. But by that time he had learnt a good deal of the art of peace. He could not undo the past. They must go on and suffer out life together; but he knew that the wisest thing for him was to retire to his world of books, and take his daughter with him. And so Letty had lived, learning too early to make the best of things, trying hard not to allow

her mother to desert her; loving her father with an ardent admiration; and yet, in spite of insults and rebukes—for very small children can be insulted—loving her mother too; for heaven had gifted her with pure fidelity, and with a patience that prevented her from wishing to transgress the law of her life, or chafe herself miserably against its barriers.

In spite of all things, her mother was her mother still; and because of that, she not only loved her—she had faith in her.

Such, as well as may be told, were the secrets of Letty's life. In such soil, only faith and patience could grow to any perfection, and they did grow to unusual strength.

So Letty now never doubted anything of the truth she had *felt*, for she had become aware of Cecil's love less by words than by feelings. Though the question arose naturally enough, what will now happen next? it gave her no anxiety. Cecil would go on, do what there was to do; she could only love and consent.

It would be no trouble to this patient soul to wait on; and the very atmosphere of her life was faith.

Still, she was changed; and when she appeared at the breakfast-table, just at the hour when Colonel Penwarne, at Coombe, received Peter Drake's letter, she was calm in an unusual beauty. Perfect as her loveliness was, there had been a stillness about it which kept it from being at the first glance attractive; but now it was all alive with the new glory that had come upon her life—with the intense happiness of a destiny known and delighted in.

The chains were falling away from her life. Emancipation had come. She was going to be that for which woman was made—a happy wife. Lord Belton could scarcely eat his breakfast for looking at her.

In her heart Sophy Cereseau said—"If I did not know my cousin so well, I should think he had proposed and been accepted." Breaking her egg with exquisite precision, Sophy glanced around. "What is the matter with her? And only my cousin and I can see it."

Sophy Cereseau was a clear-sighted young lady. She had grown wise by experience, and her experience had not been of the sort that is good for girls. She had had a lover, and he had left her; and his treatment had done something to her. What that something was, it would be very hard to describe. It had injured her. But whether the injury

was to last her life, or last only for a season, was a question still unanswered. Her aunt, Lady Dynham, knew that a good deal would depend on the experiences of country-house life, and on the next London season. She had adopted this niece, not to be the private secretary, or the instructed nurse and solace of the old age that the future might bring, but for the one simple end of getting her married. So she was very sorry for Sophy. There were times when, alas! Sophy was very sorry for herself.

"Shall we drive to Marsland, and see old Sir Harry to-day?" asked Lady Judith.

"Do. I ought to go. We knew him years ago," said Lady Dynham. "Marsland is a nice old place, isn't it?"

"No," said Lady Judith. "The old gardens are nice. The house is dreadful. Somebody pulled down the old one, and his father built this."

"The kennels are larger than the house," said Mr. Drake.

"How you exaggerate!" sneered Lady Judith.

"And some of the finest trees in the country are in the grass-pastures close by," Mr. Drake went on, without wincing. "Look at them, Dynham. You have nothing as fine at Dynely."

Lord Belton laughed, as if this was a good joke. Mr. Drake gave him a glance, which was accompanied by a smile at the thought of the absurdity of that boy marrying Letty.

"Ancestral oaks?" questioned Lord Dynham. "Yes; and ash—by much the largest in the west of England. And measure the laurels, Belton, before witnesses; write the result down, and make them sign it. Nobody, not even yourself, will believe your handwriting if you don't."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Lady Judith, "I never heard all this about the Marsland trees before."

"And the church is worth seeing," said her husband.

"It is settled, then—after luncheon?" asked Lady Dynham.

"Yes. We can take the open carriage. Letty, you can drive me in the pony-chaise. It is only five miles down the coast," to Lady Dynham.

"I would rather not go, mamma," said Letty.

"You are wanted," said her mother, in a slighting sort of way, as if her daughter's likes and dislikes were not worth alluding to.

"Lord Belton can drive you, mamma. Anybody can drive Toby."

Then Letty blushed with fright at what she had said; and a storm-cloud appeared on her mother's face.

"Then let me drive *you*," said Lord Belton to Letty; "and if we don't like it, we can please ourselves as to going on."

Letty never spoke.

"Very well," said Lady Judith to Lord Belton; "your father and mother, Sophy and I, can go in the carriage. That is settled."

Still Letty never spoke; but she gave Lord Belton a pleasant smile, because he had forgiven her speech about Toby.

Mr. Drake appeared to be extremely interested reading the newspaper. But as he stood in the hall after breakfast, he said, "Stay at home with Letty and me, Belton; you'll be better off than scorching this May day across the downs in an unsheltered pony-chaise to Marsland."

Lord Belton assented instantly.

Nothing more was said. Except that Mr. Drake had whispered to his daughter, "You need not go. I'll manage it."

After luncheon only the large phaeton appeared.

Just as she was getting in, Lady Judith said to the servant,

"Where is the pony-carriage?"

"Countermanded, my lady."

"Where is Miss Drake?"

"Oh, she and Lord Belton, and Mr. Drake, are gone to the sands, walking," said Sophy Ceresseau.

Silently did Lady Judith take her seat; feeling bitterly that this was just what her husband was always doing—such were the ways in which Mr. Drake, to avoid disputation, did as he pleased at Trederick.

At Coombe they had also had a disputatious breakfast-table. Colonel Penwarne had read Peter Drake's letter first silently and then aloud.

"Silence," he had said, in a cheerful voice.

"This note concerns us all." Wisely or unwisely, but feeling guilty as to his cherished wish that Alice and Hugo should marry, he determined, through a strong instinct against family secrets, that he would read this note aloud. "Come what will," he went on, "it will be fair play to read Peter's note to all of you."

Then, with emphasis, he read the whole.

It was Colonel Penwarne's custom to look at his wife on

occasions affecting their lives, whether those occasions were great or small. He looked at that mirror of all pure thoughts now, and she looked at him. There was silence. No one looked at Alice.

Hugo dropped his knife and fork, and looked at his plate. Still there was silence. Then Hugo said :

"It seems to me that I am the hero. Am I to take precedence and speak?"

They looked at him ; and, whiter than the table-cloth on which her eyes were fixed, unable to move, with her head in a whirl, and their voices sounding in her ears like trumpets, Alice sat in a sort of living death, yet praying for strength not to betray herself. Wishing only for one thing, to get safely through the next ten minutes with her secret safe. Happily for her, neither father nor mother saw her. They were looking at Hugo, and he had fixed his eyes firmly on the knife and fork lying across his plate.

"May I ask what you said, sir, to Mr. Drake?"

Colonel Penwarne told him.

"I won't express any opinion on what you have said. Having said it, let it be. I never questioned word or deed of yours ; though I have often questioned myself as to what my life should be, in gratitude for goodness which has even surpassed your generosity."

Alice felt the blood return to her cheeks. She thanked God that she had not yet dropped senseless on the floor. She held fast secretly by her chair. She thought she should live through it now.

"But I suppose you did not wish me to be a captive, bound by chains either of gratitude or gold. I won't be bargained for," said Hugo. "I won't go to Trederick to be set upon for Miss Drake, just that life or death may be indifferent to her father." They had better know that if the property ever became mine, I should give it back to them at once.

"You can only inherit through me, and by my will," said Colonel Penwarne, quietly. "And I should take measures to prevent that sort of thing."

Hugo pushed back his chair from the table, and rose up. There was a sort of angry impatience in his manner, which did not escape Mrs. Penwarne.

"What my brother has written is very complimentary, Hugo," she began ; but he interrupted her.

"It is an impertinence," he said, in a hurry ; then, "I beg

your pardon. I ought not to have said that before *you*. But what I mean is this—if I loved his daughter so as to wish to marry her, I would win her, even if I possessed nothing beyond my commission and the contents of my portmanteau, or I would know the reason why."

"All very well," said Colonel Penwarne, "but wild and romantic nevertheless. I don't want you to marry Letty; though you would be in great luck if you did. She is a very lovely woman, and strong enough not to be mismated, even of taken pity upon by such an iron-hearted soldier of fortune as yourself."

"And a soldier of fortune I will be, sooner than not be free."

"Hugo, be reasonable. I meant no harm. I beg your pardon for the words, whether written or spoken, that may have vexed you. Finish your breakfast."

Colonel Penwarne held out his hand. Hugo came to his side and grasped it.

"It is the burden of obligation that goads me," said Hugo. "Take back your money, and let me go."

"The boy's mad," said Colonel Penwarne, in the blandest, pleasantest way. "I give you nothing. I gave you your education and your commission. Your mother had five hundred pounds, or something of the sort. It was invested. I did very fine things with it. When you were twenty-one it was four thousand pounds. I may have tipped you with stray fifties—I gave you a horse, I think. What is such trash between you and me?"—All this time Colonel Penwarne was deliberately eating toast, and sipping at his coffee, and the utterly indifferent sort of calm that accompanied his words made Hugo feel rather ashamed of himself—"And you have given me," continued the good Colonel, "love, duty, help at need, and all that inexpressible comfort which you can never know the meaning of—not a thought connected with your mother, my wife, has ever had anything but sweetness on it. You have been my reward for a hurried but honourable act. You have made it not only easy to keep my word to her, but delightful. What greater gratification is there on earth than to see a youth grow to manhood under one's eye, beneath one's hand? Such a man as *you* are, Hugo! Look at Mrs. Penwarne—she is crying. Alice! what is the matter with you? I declare, sir, you ought to beg all our pardons. Here is my son asking me to swindle him out of two hundred a year, and send him off in heroics of independence. Independence, indeed!"

"I am not your son," said Hugo.

Out dropped those words, with the weight of a great fact on every one of them. *I am not your son.* No sentence that he had ever heard had ever fallen on Colonel Penwarne's heart so loaded with meaning. The two men's eyes met. There rose up strongly in Colonel Penwarne's heart the wonder if Hugo loved Alice; the wish that, if such a love existed, he would speak. *Then*, he thought, I shall have something to say to Peter, and I would answer his note.

Hugo never spoke. The spirit in which those words were uttered was not to be made publicly known at that time. But Alice got up, and walked into the adjoining room, where she had been with Letty the day before, and by the window she escaped to the green lawn, and to the shade of the trees in the corner.






CHAPTER XI.

GOSSIP.

One speaks the g'ory of the British Queen,
And one describes a charming Indian screen :
A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes ;
At every word a reputation dies.—POPE.

“ECIL, Cecil!” Old Sir Harry Goodman was calling piteously, hobbling through the paved yard with shrinking steps, for he was crippled in his feet and generally rheumatic.

“Here, don’t go. You can’t go to Trederrick now, my dear boy. Here is Lady Judith, and Miss Coreseau, and Lord and Lady Dynham, and your mother not come back from Patty Meadows’s. They are all in the morning-room. And it will kill me to entertain them by myself. Here, give me your arm. I’m frightfully crippled to-day. But I am well enough, once seated either on chair or saddle, still ; well enough for seventy ; but I thought myself strong enough to live to be a hundred, Cecil, when I was as young as you.”

Cecil Carteray had ordered his horse back to the stable, and given his arm to the old man without a word, but he felt vexed. If he had only started five minutes before and taken the bridle-path through the wood, while Lady Judith had advanced up the avenue ! But the annoyance was momentary. He loved the old man. To have had him cast away on such an ocean of small talk, with the rock ahead of Lord Dynham’s excellent sense—for he was famed for his excellent sense, and for being a man of observation—that was too sad a catastrophe to which to deliver over kind, genial souled Sir Harry. Cecil recovered his good-humour, and steadily conducted the rheumatic limbs to the carpeted hall, and the door of the room where the guests

were waiting. Sir Harry welcomed them all with the old-fashioned courtesy that sat so well upon him.

"And how is my fair friend, your daughter?" to Lady Judith. "She should not desert so old and so faithful an admirer as myself."

"I could not make her come," said Lady Judith.

"She preferred her father and Lord Belton," said Sophy Cereseau, looking at Cecil, and starting herself, because she saw him start.

She had often met Cecil in London. He had always been very civil to her. He had talked of Lord Dynham's connections at Trederick, of Marsland, and of the young heir of Marsland, Frederick Goodman, in India. His conversation had always a certain sort of agreeable freshness in it of country life, and the great spreading sea. It had always given Sophy pleasure, who, though living with her aunt now, was country-bred.

"I see you at last among the things you like best," she said. "in the real country."

"Does he like them?" cried Sir Harry. "Thank you, Miss Cereseau, you are an independent witness. We like him. I am glad we are remembered among all the fine distractions of the great London world. Was there a better horse in town than his 'Duchess,' tell me that, bred here on my place?"

"No, I don't think there was. I heard quantities of people admiring something that he rode—a bay, with black mane and tail."

"Ah! yes; and thank you again," exclaimed the old man, jorially. "He told me a deal about envy and admiration. But I thought he might be talking tall a little, to please his old friend, you know."

They all laughed with Sir Harry. There was something so homely, so honest, so loving, and so true about him, people could not help giving him sympathy. It pleased Cecil. Sir Harry was charmed with Sophy.

"May we visit your garden, Sir Harry?" asked Lady Dynham.

"And, bless my heart, those trees!" exclaimed his lordship.

"Cecil, show the trees, and I'll pick roses enough to fill the carriage for the ladies who will bear me company."

"May I see the trees?" asked Sophy. "I can have my share of the flowers when I come back."

"Well contrived," said Sir Harry. "I will choose the roses for you. You can't get the Marsland trees off the Marsland land." And so Sophy skipped away by Cecil's side.

"Are you going back to town soon?" asked that young lady.

"Yes; soon. But the day is not fixed."

"I have often wished to have the pleasure of knowing you," said Lord Dynham. "My niece has often met you, I know. Will you do me the favour of calling on me, some time from the middle of June to the middle of July, if you are up at that time? I shall expect you with pleasure, if you will allow me to do so."

Cecil promised to make known his presence in London; and then they talked of trees.

They were all that Mr. Drake had described them to be. Lord Dynham would take their girth, using a handkerchief for a measure. Then, at last, they were walking back again to the house.

"You know my relatives at Trederrick well?" inquired Lord Dynham.

"Very well. Ever since my father died, when I was a boy."

"I know you stand high in their good graces."

"Well, I like them both extremely."

"Letty is pretty. Was thought remarkably pretty when Lady Judith presented her last year. Not going up this year for more than a month. Absurd keeping up that town house. Always tell them so."

"Mr. Drake likes London in the winter. They were there from after Christmas to the middle of March," said Cecil. "It seems to me they have only just returned."

"True, very true; I had forgotten. We don't meet often. Habits different," said Lord Dynham. "But a monstrous pretty girl is Letty—has a will of her own, too."

It was a cruel, causeless shaft to fling at a girl like her behind her back. But even men, on the verge of growing venerable, are not above temptation. He had been a little disturbed by his son's admiration of Letty, and though she discouraged the youth as openly as the most anxious parent could desire, he could not forgive her for the beauty that attracted Lord Belton. He would never, he thought—knowing all about the property—have consented to the match, but he would have preferred its refusal to have come

from himself or his wife, certainly not from the girl. He could not divest himself of a sensation as if Letty were taking liberties with him—he had talked it over with his sailing spouse the night before—even while Letty greeted her future as a promised land which the Lord had blessed, and paid out her thanksgiving with tears.

Is it not strange to think how ignorant we are of what is going on no further off than the other side of a slight partition? Think of the strangeness of people living side by side in the same house, not only knowing *nothing*, but thinking all manner of *some things* of their neighbour, as different from the truth as darkness is from light.

What could have made Lord Dynham say that Letty had a will of her own?

Somehow it made Cecil shrink. He thought that he knew what her life was, though he had never lived in the house with her. He thought she was self-sacrificing to an uncommon degree—was there any deception? He did not put the question thus plainly—only he shrank away from any one, especially a man like Lord Dynham, who was a relation, and of course at home at Trederrick, making an observation about Letty, which seemed to drop down to the ordinary level of a pretty girl, who could be perverse in a selfish way for her own ends. He wished the trees dead, and Lord Dynham departed—at least out of Marsland.

Why did he look at Sophy? He did; and she gave an understanding smile.

"It's because of Lord Belton," she said softly, lingering behind her uncle. "I think, however, my aunt would like it. She seemed very willing to leave them behind, but *he*—" with a little flourish of her parasol towards Lord Dynham, striding on in front, flinging glances of observation to the right and to the left—"does not wish it. He thinks Letty *difficult*."

"What is that?" asked Cecil. "I feel at a loss to apply the word—do you mean difficult of approach when—when——" he could not help showing a little confusion, "when a person of Lord Belton's mind makes advances."

"How you put it—like a sentence in a book—no, I did not mean that; and I can't explain. But a difficult daughter-in-law would rule Ned, and be a bore to my uncle—and so Letty——"

"Dear me, what were we talking of?" cried Cecil.

The ladies and Sir Harry met them with the roses.

"We must go," said Lady Judith. "Cecil," she went on softly, with a smile such as she seldom wore, "will you send for the carriage?"

"And I have not said a word to you."

"Small loss, flatterer."

"Lady Judith, I want to come and see you; when may I appear?"

"To-morrow. You know we spoil you. We *all* welcome you."

"To-morrow, after luncheon, to stay till the dressing-bell rings?"

"Yes; we are going to have the Penwurnes at dinner to-morrow. Could you not stay and dine?"

"No. But I could come again."

She held him by the hand—"Come again, then. The next day?"

"Yes, if you please. Now I will order the carriage."

These few words to Lady Judith had made the pleasantest bit of the whole day to Cecil.

He put them into the carriage, and watched them drive away. That gossip about Letty had hurt him. He scarce knew why. He said he was unreasonable, but he had felt wounded, and the irritation vexed him. He saw his stepmother coming, and he went to meet her.

"I took the pony-carriage. I have been further than Patty Meadows's. I went to see Eleanor. Her husband is gone away for a day or two. I had a note from her just as I was leaving the house. It has been such a lovely day. We sat out by the old church wall, and watched the sea. Then Mr. Drake, Lord Belton, and Letty called. How pretty she looked—beautiful, I mean. She is always very nice to me. I wonder if she will marry Lord Belton. People say so. And he may turn out quite right; but just now he is so young, so very boyish. It is not a fault, of course," gossiped Mrs. Carteray, "but I would rather have seen her engaged to more of a full-grown man. I never thought of it till Eleanor told me. In fact, one is apt to think of a girl like Letty as if she belonged to the old walls, and the old associations, and to nothing else. We forget London and Paris, and the occasional visits to a German Spa; and then all at once such a girl may marry 'my lord,' before we have recollected that she ever knew him."

Cecil was helping his stepmother up a grass slope, which made a short way to the house. She had got out of the

pony-carriage, as she often did at the turn which led away to the stables.

"Quite true," he said. "And is Mrs. Baynard talking of Lord Belton's admiration for Miss Drake?"

"Had you heard it?"

"I had heard that much."

"I don't want to part with her," sighed Mrs. Carteray.

Cecil did not sigh in company. He felt angry. The thoughts were anything but peaceful that filled his heart. "If she did not understand me yesterday, no woman ever understood anybody," his inner man was saying. "Could I have made it plainer?" he questioned of his conscience; and he was answered "No. Time and opportunity considered, you could not have done more."

"And she took it well?" he questioned again of his memory. "It was not my own ridiculous vanity?"

Oh! no, Letty had understood; had accepted the love; had looked up, all sincerity, through those true, tearful eyes, quite frightened at the joy so suddenly cast before her in her life-path; had looked up with a face of promise, of faith, even of thanksgiving. In his security he had said, "Are you sorry?" In her truth she had answered, "No." He had come back to Marsland an accepted lover. He had been ready that day to go and claim her; and now the world was ringing with the news that she was to marry Lord Belton. For a short time Cecil was as angry and as miserable as a man can well be; and the circumstances were certainly both aggravating and important.

He kept on worrying himself. "If I had had her outspoken promise, I could trust her to go through anything and be faithful. But she has been taught, by the life she has led, such unnatural self-control. A hundred to one, before she slept she blamed herself for weakness, vanity, self-love, and for having foolishly attached a grave meaning to simple words. No doubt she grew sufficiently ashamed of herself to accept the discipline of saying *Yes* to Lord Belton before night, by way of recovering her position in her own esteem, and preventing any such slips for the future. What a fool a woman may be! What a fool I was to talk of going there *to-morrow*! As if I could keep my senses in the midst of such doubts as these. I'll go at once——"

He had taken Mrs. Carteray to the house, and he had been standing in this vexed state on the gravel in front of

the sitting-room window, where she and Sir Harry were talking. Cecil put his head inside the open window, and said, "Don't wait for me. I have to go to Trederrick. I will not be late." Whereupon he went to the stable, had his horse out again, took the shortest way over the reach of uncultivated land, by the path through the furze so carefully preserved for the benefit of foxes, and so got to Trederrick before Lady Judith had returned.

In that road, from which Letty had disappeared by the door in the garden wall, the day before, he found her again.

So far his thought of her had been true—that, almost, she had begun to doubt her joy; but not for the cause he had feared, only because the joy was so great, the promise so fair, the riches of the days to come so countless.

She had been up the crag-path to the spot where *it*—the fact was a nameless thing—where *it* had happened—up there alone, only the dog, Dainty, to bear her company—up to the place where he had paused for her to rest a moment, to take breath, to listen, to have all her life changed by a word. There, on that scrap of table-land, where the largest of the crags gave shelter, where, close by in a miniature valley of deep soil, the larch grouped themselves together in a glittering mass of tender green, exhaling perfume, the pet dog stopped with questioning sniffings of wonder and delight.

"Ah, Dainty, do you know? Is it all true, Dainty?" And the girl took the little creature in her arms and whispered, "It *is* all true, dear, safe little listener. We will come here every day. We may love him now." Then she spoke the truth in words for the first time, and so put Dainty down, and laughed low at her own great secret gladness, without a thought of any man on earth but Cecil Carteray, the magician who had changed her life, and was never to go out of it any more.

Then she heard the sound of a horse coming at speed. One far-off space of road she could see from her commanding position which made both sight and sound come easily to her, and she knew him, and went down the path as fast as she could go, and so was in the drive waiting as he came up.

The sight of her took away the remembrance of all the gossip he had listened to. There was only love in his heart. He stood by her side.

"I have only a few minutes to spare, I have come over



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for a word with you. Did you understand me yesterday. Did I make you understand that I love you, want you for my wife—dare to hope?"

She looked at him with the sweetest face of peaceful trust, of glad, modest love.

"You must speak to me," he said.

But she only smiled once more. It was a very eloquent smile, and he understood it; but the memory of the worry that had been in his heart urged him to something more business-like.

"What am I to say?" she asked.

"The truth," he answered, with his eyes fixed on her face. She was not in the least frightened.

"Impossible. You know I couldn't."

"You say you accept my love."

"Oh yes!" in a whisper.

"And that you love me?"

"I feel as if I could never again do without you."

"That will do," he answered, with a laugh. "Now, are you my own dear promised wife?"

"Yes."

"I think I have made you tell the truth."

"Not all."

"Tell all, then."

"But my whole life will not be long enough to tell it."

Then he put his arm round her as they stood still, he holding his horse, she looking into his face as calmly as one who gazes on her destiny, and is glad to see it as it is; and he kissed her. No man but her father had ever kissed her, except twice only, her uncle. It came to her with a grand sort of solemnity upon it, which even Cecil could not know.

"My darling, my promised wife. And you choose me before all other men. You will be faithful to me?"

"I choose you. I thank God for you. I give you my life—that is part of the truth, I think," she whispered playfully, for his kiss had unsealed her lips.

"Now I must go."

"I am sorry."

"I am coming again to-morrow." He looked at her, and she read his glance truly. He would not dare, there under the trees, to say more than he had said. He would not keep her longer, he would not stay. His eyes blessed her. Their hands were clasped in such solemn faith; in a minute he was out of sight, and again she was alone.



CHAPTER XII

DIFFICULTIES.

The footsteps of his life in mine.—TENNYSON.

NO doubt it may be a troublesome thing to be what Sophy Cerescau called "difficult." But then it may be a worse evil on some occasions for a girl to be too easy; and being difficult may arise from praiseworthy and prudential motives, and not always from those complicated states of mind which puzzle none more hopelessly than their owners.

When Alice fled from the breakfast-table at Coombe, she went off with a difficulty which had nothing to do with temper, but simply with matters of fact. Her parents had never made any difficulty about her friendship or love for Hugo. She had been brought up to like him; she had had love suggested to her at every point of intimacy, whenever they met, whenever they parted—for ever. Of course he had been the special interest of her life; and whatever other people—outsiders—had thought, they had never been the least like brother and sister. But a great peculiarity lay in this—Colonel Penwarne had contemplated their falling in love with eyes wide open; but what if Alice loved and Hugo didn't? It was a thing, all circumstances considered, very likely to occur. What then? The good man had shut his eyes to all that. Alice knew that her life was filled with the idea of Hugo. It had always been so. She had been born to a life with Hugo in it. As she grew up in a life of her own she found him still there. "The footstep of his life in mine," described a fact which had been as truly a part in the girl's existence as the love and the care of her father and mother. She loved Hugo, and she knew it; but she had never made sure of marrying him. Somehow, down in the depths of her inner consciousness, she had entertained the

notion that they were meant for each other. Hugo had never loved any one else. In the triumphant safety of this faith as to the future, she had laughed at him for admiring many a young lady's sunny smiles and golden hair; but she had done it with a consciousness of safety. In that the joke had lain; because of that Hugo had punished her with little pains and penalties, which for love's sake she had endured so pleasantly. But he had never seriously asked her to be his wife since he had this time returned to them in England, and on long leave. It had struck her like a blow to hear that sentence read aloud from her uncle's letter. That Letty should marry Hugo—her own Hugo—that all this should be planned and spoken of before she had been asked to whom such plans might bring life or death, according to their success or failure—it almost killed her to have her life so changed all in a moment. How could it be possible for any woman to marry a man loved by another woman as she loved Hugo? How could she tread out all the footsteps of life if she were to tread them out alone, and lose his life so utterly as she would lose it if he gave himself to another? It was as if an earthquake had shaken this life of Alice's, and left her vibrating in giddy dread of what might happen next.

Then, as she stood by herself among the huge flowering shrubs, watching the tremblings of their shadows on the velvet turf, Hugo stood by her. They were quite silent for a minute. But even his presence strengthened her.

"Alice, I love you," he said. "Let me ask your father for you. One word, please. May I go?"

Through her mind there rushed many things. He might have asked her before, and he had not. He must have known that something more than the daily life they led together would be necessary. He proved it by speaking plainly now.

"Do you love me really?" she asked.

"Yes, I have never cared for any one else. You know I have always so treated you, haven't I?"

"Would you have asked me now, Hugo, if that letter had not come from Uncle Peter?" Nothing could better show the perfectly harmonious terms on which they had lived than this debate. "Answer me quite truly," she said. "Think a minute, and tell me sincerely—should you?"

"No," he said. "We are very happy; you are very young. I suppose I like the letting-well-alone plan. But many

things might have made me speak, and the thing that has now done it has certainly been Mr. Drake's letter."

"But you know that only by marrying Letty can you make *sure* of Trederrick and all the rest of it."

"Hang Trederrick!"

"I think you should think more about it."

"As I love you, I need not think."

"That is feeling, habit, custom. I wish you to think as well as feel."

"Good heavens! Alice, you are not refusing me?"

He turned pale. It was anger or fright, no matter which. Alice put her hand on his arm.

"If you had spoken sooner, I should have said *yes*; if you ever speak later, I suppose that then I shall say *yes*; just now I would rather let things stay as they are. You *must* think about Letty. You must be quite sure that you could never under any circumstances repent of not having adopted Uncle Peter's idea. You do not know how nice Letty is—how very good and clever."

"I could not fall in love with her if she were an angel. You are in my life, and I can't face life without you. As to not asking you before, no man likes to break up so perfect a style of companionship as we keep up among each other here. It is a very uncommon thing for a man to be as utterly alone as I am. I come here, and it is like warming a starved beggar by the fire in the winter. It takes some courage to risk a polite bow from Colonel Penwarne, with the assurance that he would give me all except his only child—his daughter. Oh! yes; reality was too good a thing to risk—if I had not been driven so desperately hard, I would not have spoken to you now."

It was an odd sort of love-making, and Alice could scarcely keep up a proper gravity, now that she knew she had Hugo's love, and need not fear. But she smoothed away her smiles, knowing they would annoy him.

"Dear Hugo, she said, "go away now, or come with me to Miss Teague's. *Our time is not come*—that's enough to say at present.

"Alice, you will never play me false?"

"I have been your slave and humble captive all my life, she said. "Say no more."

She left him standing there, and turned to go into the house.

"Alice"—he called after her, and she came back. He

was looking very grave—almost sad. “How does it stand between us? Did you not know in your heart that you were the chosen one?”

“Yes; I think I did. But a new thing has come into your life—indeed, a new life began I think when we came here. I must now be preferred as well as chosen; the force of circumstances won’t do any longer—it must be the force of preference after approval—after comparison with others—it is very hard to say what I mean,” she said.

“Said or unsaid, I understand you,” he answered. “Alice, you have thought it out wisely. To be chosen and preferred, to have choice confirmed by trial, and constancy proved, is *your right*. No one can be more ready to give you your right than I am. Now let us go to Miss Teague.”

So it was peace between them, and yet they were free.

She had satisfied her self-respect; and to live a life in harmony with herself was, Alice knew, necessary to her happiness. She was glad to have got this interview over, and thankful that they were friends still.

They walked across the lawn together towards a gate in the iron railing that parted off the wooden hill-side to the right, through which a way led to the village, by mossy banks and under the cedars—on by a wide green glade where beech-trees grew—into smiling sunlight, by moist land, where a rivulet overflowed its banks, to the frequent blessing of fern and feather grass, making a low wooden bridge a pretty necessity—on they went, till they stood on this bridge, and looked down on the greenest of grass, through which the irises were raising their golden heads, and the *Osmunda Regalis* was unfurling its foliage from the confining clasp that held it in brown furry balls; and there they both stopped.

“There’s a kingfisher,” said Hugo eagerly. “They used to build here when we were children.”

“And there beyond are the ‘conkerbells’ which I used to gather years ago. Look how they cover the ground with their rich growth of leaves, and make all under the trees purple with their flowers!”

“How well I remember it all!” said Hugo.

“How it brings the boy and girl time back!” said Alice.

“I declare I am a boy, and I expect Miss Teague to scold me.”

“What for?” asked Alice.

“Why, I promised to go with your father to Newton!”

"Oh, Hugo! please to go back directly."

"I must—you can get on alone," he said. Then, quickly,
"Alice, you use me very ill."

"No—I use you well."

"I can't understand you."

"You can't understand facts, you mean."

"You have kept all other women out of my life. Think of that; and I am ten years older than you are. You treat me like a boy."

"Never mind that. I can't help myself. I treat you according to my nature."

"I say again you have kept every other woman out of my life."

Alice gave a sigh. Had she to say it all over again? She began once more—"So far, through all the circumstances that have surrounded us, you have thought of me. Now, to-day, other and new, even unexpected, circumstances have arisen. It does not follow that, only just out of mere girlhood, I am to be stronger than these new things. Try—in justice to yourself, in justice to me—try the strength of this temptation. I think I know its strength better than you do. I was born to these associations—I know how very powerful such things become. They are yours by right. They are offered to you by Uncle Drake, as your own, for a certainty——"

"For Heaven's sake don't go on——"

"I am talking of myself as well as of you. I must go on. I say it is impossible for *you*—you, Hugo, with your history, your bringing up, to know how great a thing it is that Uncle Drake offers. You have not learnt the value of Frederrick in the world into which you have been transplanted. Hear how plainly I speak! You certainly know nothing of Letty. That you should love and marry Letty is the wisest thing you can do. It would settle her life as well as yours. Seeing this, as I see it, I say what I am saying, and I act as I act, in justice to myself as well as to you. Please to get thoroughly acquainted with your circumstances——" Alice gave a sigh.

What a great many words she had said—how it was all slaying her! She felt giddy and weary—oh, if she could go to sleep for six months! After all, she did not believe that Hugo was listening. He was thinking of the kingfisher, and watching for it to come forth with its sweeping flight from under the bridge again—she knew he was.

She looked up with a face of despair at his being *so difficult*, and then he said, "Oh, my circumstances—get accustomed to my new life—find out the advantages of having the roots of my life in the soil, like an old yew-tree in a churchyard, among the bones of my ancestors, especially of that great heiress our common great—I don't know how many greats—grandmother, Letitia Trederrick—By Jove! there he goes again!"—this in a whisper, and with a head turned to the kingfisher—"and become blind to the foot-steps that have been in my life, from the earliest period of red morocco boots to those very remarkably neat balmorals—supposing that result, and, to put it short, me married to Letty, what then?"

"I would not break my heart," said Alice.

"Very well," answered the hero by her side with a toss of his head. "But I must go now, or I shall keep Colonel Penwarne waiting. Go on by yourself. I can see you out of sight while I light a cigar."

So Alice walked on by herself, out of the shadow of the trees, and away—every step further away from Hugo. She felt the fragrance of the tobacco like sweetbrier following her down the wood path. At the farthest point of sight, where the gate was which opened on the village road, she looked back. He had followed her a few steps, and was watching still. He took his hat off to her; she waved her hand. Then they were out of each other's sight, and she stood among the stones in the hard dry village road, feeling shaken from head to foot, but firm in her inner self as the hard rock that cropped up in the street, quite sure that she was right.

Nevertheless, when she opened the door of Miss Teague's breakfast-room, and stood for an instant with her young eyes on that true friend's face, it seemed to that friend as if years had rolled themselves away, and that the old life had come back. The girl gave one of her mother's low sad cries—she uttered the name her mother had invented in her infancy. "Oh, Nanny Teague, Nanny Teague!" and once more the protecting arms were held forth, and the troubled young heart rested on a faithful breast.

"My darling!" said Miss Teague, holding both of Alice's hands.

"Yes, I am going to tell you," said Alice.

Then she described everything that had happened—all the story of the letter her father had written, and of her

Uncle Peter's answer; of the breakfast-table conversation; of her own confusion and misery; of her recovery, her resolutions; of Hugo asking her to marry him as they stood under the trees. Then came the answer she had made—the cruel repetition of her determination on the bridge—and of her last words that she wouldn't break her heart; and then she burst out crying, while Miss Teague contemplated her with a face of unusual seriousness.

"Are you strong enough, Alice?" she asked softly. "It is a very strong line to take—are you strong enough for the work?"

"Yes, quite. Anything else would leave me in a fright and a tremble for all my life. I *must* believe in him, through and through, to be happy. How could I believe if he turned away from a trial instead of going through with it?"

"What do you mean by trial?"

"He must prove himself—prove himself incapable of loving Letty and caring for Trederrick."

"How can he?"

"He must."

"But how can he?"

"Well, by letting time pass; by standing in their lives, and finding out for himself whether it is not better to be in their lives than in ours." Then Alice buried her face once more in her hands, and wept bitterly.

"My dear child!" exclaimed Miss Teague, sorely puzzled in her heart.

"I cry because I can't recover the strain of the last few hours in any other way. What a blessing to have you to come to!—oh, what a blessing you are!"

"Alice, this has, without your knowing it, been the desire of your heart all your life."

"I don't know. Perhaps. But if it has turned to *fear*? And why should not Letty have her chance?" she said suddenly.

"Nonsense. Who made you Letty Drake's special Providence? Nonsense! I believe that you are only romantic, like the ladies in old stories, whose knights had to go forth and fight a dragon before they would believe."

Alice wiped her eyes and smiled. "Perhaps they were right," she said. "I know that this trial has come unasked into my life, and my knight must prove himself. And if I lose him I must accept the grief, and recover from it. It may have been my heart's desire to be Hugo's wife, but even that might be bought too dear."

Then the tears appeared to have been all shed, and Miss Teague asked no more whether her darling was strong enough for the thing she had resolved upon. But she said, "So let it rest, then. What are you going to do this morning?"

"You are going to keep me. My mother will fetch me in the afternoon."

"But I am engaged to visit Mrs. Ferris, and see the dairy. Are you rested? Will you go?"

In a few minutes they were walking across the field to the "Cot Farm." But before they reached the farm Miss Teague spoke again.

"It has certainly always been the idea of your life; without knowing it, perhaps, your hope."

"I said to you that it has turned to fear."

"A woman should have more trust, I think. No other man could have tempted you away from Hugo."

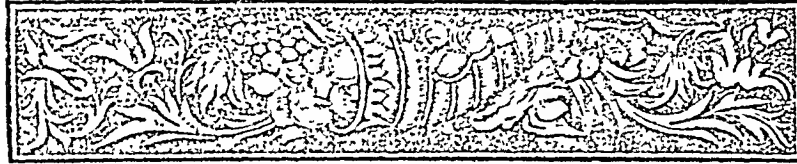
"No other, certainly."

"Trust him."

"I can't. I must have proof. I know nothing of trust. I have never had to practise trust. I only know that, for the first time, I fear."

"Alas! Is there indeed no real good under the sun?"





CHAPTER XIII.

COT FARM.

The inward shaping towards some unborn power,
Some deeper breathing act, the being's flower.

GEORGE ELIOT.

MISS TEAGUE and Alice walked through the grass field, leaving the great arbutus, grander than ever in its growth for the years that had passed since we first saw it in this story, and turning their backs on the orchard that sloped away towards the sea.

It seemed to Miss Teague as if, indeed, years had rolled back, and the mother, and not the child, was walking by her side. Changes had happened, however, many and great, since the old Trederrick days. The Cot Farm, to which they were going, was a gable-ended dwelling, which peeped out in white-washed prettiness far among the group of high elms which stood outside the straw-yard wall. It was an old cottage added to; and instead of the half-starved cottager, up whose steep stairs she and Jane had carried mutton-broth and innumerable delicacies, the enlarged habitation was reigned over by that ancient dame, the sister of Chronieler Davies, and the last survivor of that family, usually called respectfully the Widow Ferris. This woman was Miss Teague's tenant. She was a person of great natural kindness, considerable cleverness, and possessing a powerful will. The Widow Ferris had taken the charge of a niece of her husband, a widow like herself, confined to her bed, or, at best, to a sofa, by hip disease; and a boy, this woman's son, who was supposed to be able to earn some small portion of his bread by helping Widow Ferris in her labours.

They heard the good woman's voice before they saw her portly, and not uncomely person. They stopped to disentangle the mysteries of the fastening of the wicket gate, and so surprised her engaged in what she called the "documenting" of Joe.

Joe was on his back in a stripe of strong sunshine, on a heap of straw, with his arms crossed before his eyes.

"Get thee up, Joe, and go after the letter which your mother frets about, lying in Newton post-office," she says. "Seems to me Canada's no such long way off, since folks write so frequently. Get up and go, boy. What do you lie there for kicking with your feet when I speak to you? You don't talk with your toes, do you?"

The click of the gate, and the entrance of the ladies, had probably more effect on Joe than all that Mrs. Ferris said to him. He sprang up quickly enough when he found them near, and said he would go to his mother for the message.

The Widow Ferris apologized. "Those boys, they do take a deal of talking to. But I can't part mother and child, and she won't be here for long. And 'tis her late husband's brother who is writing to her. He has a brave bit of land out there, and he has married quite a lady, and they have a daughter who writes her sentiments with such expressions, and those long dictionary words, I'm dazed to see them. It's all the woman has in the world—she married a cousin—and that great waste of water between them. Well, now, dear-me! to think of my running on upon our own affairs. Will you please to step in, ladies?"

So they all went into the house, where Geraldine Graham, the young-looking widow—for she looked very young to be the mother of such an infant Hercules as Master Joe, aged ten—lay on a chintz-covered, old-fashioned sofa, and watched her sturdy boy eat bread and cheese, which Sally the servant-girl had served to him, preparatory to his journey to Newton.

"And don't loiter, darling," half spoke, half gasped the mother, who showed in her face more than the wreck of considerable beauty—the eager, trembling, hungry desire to get this letter, which her heart told her waited at Newton, stuck in the window, for the friendly call of some Trederrick neighbour who might offer to bring it.

"Why are you not like all of us, in the care of the post-man?"

"We shall be, after this. We have so lately come. When

I wrote I could only say 'to be left at the office till called for.' You will make haste, Joe."

The sick woman, in her eagerness, had no civil words of greeting for their visitors. Joe put two pieces of cheese into his mouth, and a piece of bread followed hurriedly. The Widow Ferris looked vexed.

"The food would no worse if you eat it slower," said she; "but I ain't bound to feed ye against time, that's a comfort."

The sick woman looked up with fevered lips, half open, and pleading eyes.

"All right, mother," said Joe. "Where's the shilling?"

"Shilling!" exclaimed Mrs. Ferris.

The trembling mother put the coin on the table, and the boy caught it up.

"This is for me, that I mayn't tarry by the way," he said; and giving a triumphant look at his old aunt, he fled out of the house.

"Geraldine," exclaimed Mrs. Ferris severely, "when will you begin to make a man and a son of the boy? And money—though you are moderate well off with your annuity—is not so easy to come by as that anybody should waste it."

"I can't help it," gasped Mrs. Graham. "Brother Joe is all I have. I am dying for that letter," she said, petulantly. "It's all the pleasure that comes into my life. And to think of my not being well enough to go, and they so strong persuading me. But I can fancy it when I read their letters, and that's the best thing left to me now."

She fell back on the cushion of the couch, and wiped the tears from her face.

"You are ill and weak. May I send you some of my mother's good nourishing things from Coombe?" said Alice.

"No, no, dear lady. I am wrong and importunate. I want more than heaven gives. Keep a contented spirit, and limit your desires. I can give you that advice, and I may well venture, for I am very near the bed where all are equal."

"Both rich and poor,
At Death's sure door,
Have each a sheet, and nothing more,"

quoted Mrs. Ferris decisively. Then she walked through the house into a court behind, and Miss Teague followed her. Alice gave a wistful glance at the sick woman, but

she waved her thin hands, and a voiceless "go!" trembled on her lips. But Alice flew back to Geraldine's side for one moment.

"She is kind to you?"

A bright smile lighted up the pale face.

"Yes, very—oh! *very* kind! See what mistakes my exhibition of self-love might have led to! Very kind, and very good."

Then Alice left her, and joined Miss Teague.

"Geraldine is a poor dear creature, and got so near to the unseen things now, that she stretches out her hands like a blind body a-reaching after this and that, that seems to be the way of some of them. And then my husband's brother was her father, both of them dead and gone. He was all for learning, and he educated those children of his quite unreasonable. Geraldine married pretty decent. Goneril died. Joseph—he was the only one called a Christian name—he tried fifty things, but the education came in the way, and then he died too. This Canada Graham's wife is a sort of a Frenchy," said Mrs. Ferris, wishing to explain herself, "and they say that Captain Hugo's mother was a sort of a Frenchy too. But Canada ist nowheres near France, and I can't understand."

Then Miss Teague explained the mystery to Mrs. Ferris, who declared herself to be more settled in her mind in consequence.

"They are educated to suit, he and his wife; and they do suit, and have children to match, which is quite comfortable and comfortable; and it's all been like a thing in a book, and poor Geraldine lives upon their letters. They will take the boy, if he likes to go, when she dies, and that keeps it all nearer and nearer day by day to her poor sinking heart. But if he is to go out there respectable, he ought to get more learning than he has. Why, they talk French, bless'ee!" With which grand climax Mrs. Ferris turned the conversation to what was immediately before them, the dairy and its contents.

"There's seven pans of cream, and not a dairy alive can beat them. There's a colour—see to the thickness. It's sweet like the morning as you scent the air."

Miss Teague and Alice admired everything, as they were expected to do. And, indeed, it was a beautiful sight. The china-panelled walls, the untainted whitewash, the floor of slate-like marble, the granite slabs on which the full milk

pans stood in a long row of richness and beauty, and the pure air passing through the window, carefully wired against the flight of insects, or the approach of any creeping thing. It was a delightful sight, and Mrs. Ferris revelled in it.

She deserved to succeed in her dairy work, if habitual purity and the perfection of order are ever to be properly rewarded. It would be impossible to describe what her cleanliness was. It was an infatuation, like her love of whitewash—she whitewashed the handles and tops of her flat-irons. And it was a maxim with her to wash all the things that were clean. "*If you don't they will get dirty.*" Nobody could contradict this truth. Sally faithfully practised it.

"And there's a deal in farm-life, Miss Alice," said the good woman, "that is very perjinkit. 'Tis only He who made 'em as can tell why the hands of a red-haired woman won't beat butter." They lived, it will be observed, in a country where churns were unknown.

"How long has Mrs. Graham been ill?" asked Alice, uncivilly following out her own thoughts instead of the suggestions of her hostess.

"Off and on, these five years; and she'll never see another. Don't you know how it is; yet how should you? Well, there is this; the looking on, on, on—the hoping always in the thing that is to come. I too had my education, such as was the best about here when I was young. I was two years at a boarding-school at Newton. Think of that, now! And no doubt the reading and writing, the figures, yes, and the poetry, with all the fine sampler-working of Adam and Eve, with the rows of fancy stitches, had a kind of something in them that taught me to think, and calculate, and turn corners, and make observations; and a deal of eyesight went to it, I can tell you. Then you see, Miss Alice, if you'll pardon my rambling——"

"I like it, thank you; please to go on," said Alice.

"Well, then; I was going to say that the time comes, after those memory-working, calculating, and contriving days, when one uses one's gifts of observation, not upon Adam and Eve in cross and tent, but upon their children, the living mortals all around; and I see things, and I lay them by; and by what I see of Geraldine I know her time is nearly run. She has trod out all her footsteps within two or three."

"But how do you know?"

"There's the reaching out and the looking on. *Time present* is no use to her now; and yet to you and to me, strong as we each of us are for our years and places, it is everything. With her it is the looking on—in winter 'tis for the airs of spring; in spring for the heat of summer; in the summer for the cool autumn; and then for the strengthening frosts—mostly people are incurable when it comes to that. And I have often observed it. It was but this morning she said, 'Oh, I am down-hearted now, but I shall pick up again when you can take me to the beach, and I can sit under the shelter of the rocks in the summer time.' 'Tis the looking forward comforts people. But it don't comfort them till this present life is passing away."

Alice could have listened for any length of time to Mrs. Ferris's wisdom, but the good woman, leaving her large, well-starched spotless apron on a shelf by the dairy-door, and replacing it with the canvas covering which she had hung outside on a nail before they entered, led the way to an enclosure where seven sleek cows were lazily standing, killing time, as they so often seem to be doing, in as many moods and tempers.

"That's Dairy—she's the best I ever knew. Look at her. She's contented. A worriting cow is never a good milker. And the dun cow is the master cow. There's always a master cow, or there ought to be. It keeps order. There's a many things to dispute about in the kingdom of cows," says Mrs. Ferris, with a laugh. "The master cow has to be milked first, fed first—then she keeps the others out of mischief, and gets into it herself. But it's better to have one in the wrong than all seven, you know."

"Have you lived far away all your married life?" asked Alice.

"Yes. I married a foreigner," said Mrs. Ferris, with an air of grandeur; but she only meant that her husband had not come from her part of England. He had in fact been a Buckinghamshire farmer. "He had property. It made a deal of work. I came here upon times—mostly burials," she added, with a sigh. "Now I am the only one of my family left. The Chroniclers are all over. And isn't it strange that they should have lived and kept the memory green of the branch that was cut off and sent away, and not died out till the last and only one should stand on the old acres once more, and be acknowledged by his own people? I'd like to see the Captain one day. I hear good things of

him. But 'tis strange as to the Chroniclers. To think that my brother should have had but one child, and be a deaf and dumb boy, who fell over the cliff and never breathed afterwards. All passed away when there was no more to tell. I make many observations on it. But pray bring the Captain down, Miss Alice. You are just like brother and sister, I suppose."

"Yes," said Alice with a little gasp—"Yes; just the same."

Alice and Miss Teague wandered away across the short grass, and over a low stone fence to the still shorter-turfed top of the cliff, where they sat down, sheltered by the wall, near a bed of wild thyme, looking down the broken, turfy shale-stone cliff, where the young fern was giving out its brilliant green feathers to the sun's rays, and the villagers' sheep were uttering plaintive cries after their lambs straying into dangerous places beyond the narrow paths so useful both to sheep and men.

The shrubby heath was green in stiff spreading beds, the gorse was springing, but the purple and gold had not come yet. The great sea spread far, and softened away into a veil of silvery haze which hid the horizon. A fleet of fishing-boats were out in the bay. A sort of glad peacefulness seemed to be spread out before them; a solemnity seemed to rise from the great expanse, and the silence which belonged to it. Not a human voice was heard. Only the sound of the heaving of the waves on the shingle just at the high-tide point, and the lazy falling back, as if they had done their utmost and could do no more.

There they sat for a while, each occupied with her own thoughts, Geraldine Graham having a large share of Alice's.

At last Miss Teague spoke.

"This morning I walked on the sands early. The whole space from Trederrick to Gwylder was crossed and recrossed by coming and going foot-prints. It saves the miners of Tregear and Polderrow more than two miles when the tide is far enough out to allow of their taking their way by the sands. They had all passed that way this morning. I stayed there a long time. Up came the sea, and foot-print after foot-print was washed smooth. Nevertheless the sands had served the people's turn, and would be ready again by-and-by. I am getting to 'garrulous old age,' Alice—but I, like Geraldine, must have trodden out most of my foot-prints on the sands of Time. On goes Time; he fills up our foot-prints, and the sands are smooth

for human treading once more. But while they lasted, there they were; the father's and the boy's—the girls' in a group—the young men's dashing in among them out of the crowd that followed last. So my steps have been with you mother's, with your father's, with those of the dead, with your uncle's, dashed in upon by Lady Judith,—sent astray into new lines, to find young foot-prints—yours, Hugo's—Soon the great ocean will blot out all the story they might tell. Whether I walked alone, as my name on my headstone might seem to declare—'Marian Teague, spinster'—or whether my life was always so full of other people's lives as to make my single state read like a joke, who will know—or care? *You* will care—all of you, I mean. You will say she did this; she did that; she advised such a thing, she arranged the other. Influence survives. Perhaps some will walk straighter for the dead heart's love and teaching. I wish I could be sure of your life going straight, Alice. I am not sure about the thing you have done to-day "

"But it is done," said Alice.

"Not past *my* undoing."

"Oh, don't!"

"What a man wants is that which he should have. You are Hugo's need, and you ought to be very glad."

"What does that mean?"

"That you should marry him now. The wife whom a good man would choose is better to him than houses and lands. Don't deceive yourself. I have been thinking of what you said as to the possibility of giving up the desire of one's heart. I think now that such resignation is only required of you when some great duty intervenes. That which is offered to you is the great earthly good. I am not sure about your having and your taking, just as you please."

"But if he married, and my father died before my uncle, as from their ages we might expect, Hugo would never have Frederrick. I should have kept him out of it."

"He would have given it up for you," said Miss Teague, "always supposing, of course, that Letty would have him——"

"Anybody would, I should think," said Alice.

"My dear, you are proud."

"No, I fear I am humble. I fear he might repent."

"Then you don't love him."

Alice jumped up almost angrily. "How can you say so?"

"Oh! it is certainly pride. And you do not love him at all as he loves you."

"I can't quarrel with you. And you soothed me so an hour ago! Now I am wounded to the quick."

"You deceived yourself and me by fair words. Besides, I hesitated in my judgment."

"You!"

"Yes; because I am myself. Old people hesitate, not from incapacity, but because they have lived long enough to know that they must contemplate both sides of a story, and take in the possibilities of each position. We must see all round, and into the ins and outs of a matter. Then we speak. Now, youth sees one side only; as you, in pretending to see Hugo's, only see your own—and your pride. Youth has no scruples; you have none. You send Hugo to earn and labour for the gift which should be his freely, and as a reward already won."

"I know my own nature," said Alice, "and I fear."

"When a girl of nineteen can't believe that a man of eight-and-twenty is able to guide his own life and know his own mind—that man too being Hugo Penwarne—she has clearly no faith in him. She does not love him. You will find some one else one day. Now let us go home. His footsteps are not in your life, as you think they are. There, don't answer me. I am sure that lamb has lost its mother. It has got over that low place in the fence. Let us show it the way home again."

So they drove the bleating runaway back among the sheep-paths, and watched the maternal recognition.

"I hope *my* mother is not waiting for *me*," said Alice.

"We dine at Frederrick to-day."

As they neared the house, they saw Mrs. Penwarne standing, looking for them on the orchard slope.

"How pleasant it is!"

"How the world has changed in twenty years!" was Miss Teague's rejoinder. "But, Jane, this child of yours says she knows nothing of trust."

"What a transparent life it must have been!" said Mrs. Penwarne. "But that," she went on—"that, Alice, is the climate in which trust lives and grows. The absence of distrust is the presence of trust. You would never distrust your father or me?"

"Never."

"We have won that by our lives, by our trusting intercourse with each other. We have grown beneath your father's example. He is truth itself."



CHAPTER XIV.

A MAN'S DESPAIR.

Sweet April!—many a thought
Is wedded unto thee, as hearts are wed;
Nor shall they fail, till, to its autumn brought,
Life's golden fruit is shed.—LONGFELLOW.

“**D**ECIDEDLY superior. Certainly—decidedly so.”
Such had been Lord Dynham's judgment pronounced to his smiling spouse as to Hugo Penwarne when the dinner party at Trederrick was over. But Lord Dynham had not on that evening been blessed with the eyes that see beneath the surface. It was plainly visible that Captain Penwarne had been “decidedly superior,” but the fact of his doing duty in a state of despair was not recognised.

When Hugo had seen Alice pass through the wood-gate and go out of sight, he had turned back to the house. He was smitten. He was goaded by a great disappointment, and cruelly astonished.

It was not this man's nature to weep or whine, or even to grow eloquent in the pleading of a cause which seemed to be as close and dear to him as life. He felt without saying it, even without clearly knowing what he felt, that, if Alice could not understand him, she was not worthy of understanding. Why had she accepted the worship of his life? Was it possible that she could have accepted so much—so much, that it was *all*—and valued it not at all?

He got to the house. The groom was in the act of bringing the horses round from the stable to the door. He walked in. Colonel Penwarne stood in the hall, with his beautiful wife by his side. They looked at him with glad, welcoming, approving smiles. They knew that he had been out with Alice. He passed them quickly, and returned speedily to mount his horse and ride away by his good friend's side.

For a short time neither spoke. Then the Colonel said:

"You are going, then, to buy that bay of Sir Harry's. A useful horse. I think you would do well."

"No," said Hugo; "I believe all that is changed."

"What?" The tone of voice told Colonel Penwarne that there was something wrong.

"I am cut to pieces," said Hugo. "I have spoken to Alice, and she——"

He was choking. Colonel Penwarne uttered a strong exclamation betokening sympathy and surprise.

"Yes," said Hugo, "and Alice has known for the last ten years that for me there was only herself in the world."

"What is it, then?"

"That impertinent letter from Mr. Drake."

"Oh, oh!" half laughed Colonel Penwarne. "Won't she take her triumph? She is only coy about being crowned in such a hurry. Don't despair, Hugo."

But Hugo brought his horse to a stand, and spoke very gravely. "Let us talk it out under the trees. All my life I have walked up to one thing, and you have seen it—liked it."

"Yes," said Colonel Penwarne.

"Now my life is changed. I have to turn my back on that which has filled my life, and I have to walk off into a world without Alice in it. I think I see it all plain enough. Do I make you see it?"

Colonel Penwarne never spoke; but he moved his head assentingly, and fixed his eyes on the bowed head of the man who sat looking down on the mane of his horse, and talking his thoughts out steadily.

"I think I *must* make you understand, if possible," said Hugo; "we have been strangely brought together. You have been all I ever wanted, as I grew up by your side; and every action of yours gave me leave to love Alice."

"Yes," once more fell from the listener's lips.

"Somehow, I know that Alice knew this. Alice knew she had my life as her own; Alice took it. She has now forgotten all, wiped out all my life, put me on trial, and proposes to listen to me when I have been put through the proof. But I won't be bargained about. Love ought not to be bargained about. Here, there is no sun in the sky now for me. I can't bear it. I do not feel as if I could ever ask her again. She has injured me. I do not want a wife with whom I should associate an injury. Colonel Penwarne, I

have silently acquiesced in all your generous words in my favour, but now, I must be independent of you. No obligation was worth a thought in the light of her love; but without her I must stand untrammelled. If that four thousand pounds is really mine——”

“It *is* yours. No one else could honourably touch a penny of it. I only gave you your education and your maintenance, as a wealthy stepfather might be expected to do; and you have reflected honour and credit on me from the first.”

“Then I will take it and go,” said Hugo.

“You will exchange before your leave expires?”

“As soon as I may.”

“Hugo, I am very sorry,” said Colonel Penwarne. “I must tell my wife. I wish you would try again.”

“I am beaten,” said Hugo.

“No, no. You are a strong man, and——”

“I couldn’t succeed,” said Hugo, now gently urging on the horse that had stood half dreaming in the still shade. “I might deserve something and get it. But what I have already deserved—where would that be?”

“Persevere,” said Colonel Penwarne; “I say again be strong.”

“And it seems to me that perseverance, when there can be no success, is not strength, but weakness and folly. Why, she loved me when I first went into action at eighteen; and now, after ten years, she says, ‘Prove yourself!’ Perhaps I imagined too great a perfection; but I don’t want a patched-up life.”

Then Colonel Penwarne lifted his hat from his head and said once more, “I am sorry;” and then, “God’s will be done!”

Now, people who walk very straightly through this life, as did this good, strong, simple-minded Colonel Penwarne—whose footsteps are never found treading out of the plain path, stopping to bury their feet in the cushions of soft moss; or to tread the fragrance out of the spreading thyme on the rising banks, are apt not to make allowances for those who find frequent and perhaps innocent occupation in these idlings by the way.

Some people have in their lives a steady succession of events, to meet which they are called imperatively, till it becomes as second nature to walk straight. They have no time for trifling. They see things as they are, and accept them in their truth. And they think that all others are as themselves. Colonel Penwarne believed Hugo’s account of

Alice's mind, and when he repeated the conversation to his wife he said, "She never loved him."

Whatever Colonel Penwarne said his wife believed. "Are we to speak to Alice?" was all she said. She did not feel for Alice, for she saw no cause for sympathy; all her sympathy went out to her adopted son. So when Colonel Penwarne said "Ask Hugo," she walked away seeking that hero, and she found him in the lime-tree walk.

She fluttered up to him like a wounded dove, in a way that belonged to her, lifting her sweet eyes to his hard face, and putting her hand inside his arm. He held her hand fast, looked lovingly into her face and kissed her. "I should have liked to belong to you, very much," he said.

"Oh, you do," she whispered in a voice of alarm.

"Ah, yes; but in a meagre sort of way."

"We must speak to Alice?"

"You must do as you please," he said. "Of course I was obliged to tell Colonel Penwarne."

"And you won't go away from us?"

Hugo looked at her and laughed; "Colonel Penwarne could have lived very happily here at Coombe, if you, at Trederick, had said *no* to him."

"Oh, Hugo! But we——"

"No. You are not such very great exceptions. I have a something to do which can't be done here. I have to retrace my footsteps, and strike out a path where hers can never come. Obviously, that work can never be done here. But you are always to be a mother to me, you know; and while I am here, make no visible difference. Can that be?"

"Oh, so easily," she said, with pleading eyes—"Let us be happy again."

"Yes. I see no reason for anything else for you." But he never said a word about himself.

And so, when Mrs. Penwarne met Alice in the orchard at Miss Teague's, she knew all the events of the morning as regarded that young lady and the life-long lover whose value she had failed to comprehend.

They walked back by the wood-walk.

When they got to the sloping lawn, and were approaching the house, Mrs. Penwarne said, "My darling, Hugo rode to Newton with your father, and he told him of his disappointment."

"Is he disappointed?" said Alice, swallowing hard, and pressing her hands together with the strength of a vice to brace her nerves up, to the point of obedience to her will.

"Of course," said Mrs. Penwarne.

Then her father came to the entrance-door, and stood still in its archway. He advanced a step to meet her. He drew her towards him. He said, "Try not to make any difference, my love. For ourselves, every wish of ours we sacrifice to your happiness."

She never spoke. She got up a quiet smile, and then quickly turned her head away. They were in the hall.

"Luncheon," said a man-servant. "Captain Penwarne left word that he was gone to Marsland."

"How is he gone?" asked the Colonel.

"Walking, sir."

Then they sat down to lunch. Alice trembled; felt strangely; was glad, for the first time in her life, that Hugo was absent. Then she talked of Mrs. Graham and of Joe, and told her mother how many cows were standing in Mrs. Ferris's yard.

"Now, don't go out again in the heat. This month is as warm as June," said Mrs. Penwarne. "Remember that we dine at Trederrick."

Alice went into the sanctuary of her own room. Her first thought was one of self-gratulation. "How glad I am that I never answered my father; never said anything to my mother. Hugo disappointed! Well, he knows I love him. I told him he could come again. I only said, 'Prove your love to be beyond the temptations which are set before it.' I had surely a right to say that—can no one understand?"

She would not admit fear into her heart. Of course he would be faithful. Life without Hugo! How could she bear it? When the suggestion came, she laughed it to scorn. She defied everything and everybody. Hugo leave me! Hugo! So she lived through the afternoon lonely, scorning, defying, and bent on triumph. Something had transformed her. She scarcely recognized her own soul when she looked into its depth and boasted to her spirit of its power and its strength.

Suddenly there came back a troublesome memory to her. Had she not said that, if he fixed on Letty, she would not break her heart? Did that look as if she held on still to the certainty of his faithfulness? Did it sound as if she intended, and had indeed determined, to be faithful herself?

But self-tormenting was not an employment in which Alice was at all a proficient. She almost laughed at the idea of his thinking himself dismissed. How could she know,

her heart questioned, that he would take every word so seriously; he who was watching a kingfisher all the while she was speaking. What folly it all was! As soon as he came back, she would scold him—scold him for having told her father. And while Alice was going through all this vexation, her mother was feeling that there had been a melancholy quite unutterable in Hugo's tenderness to her. It was a farewell. She knew the perfection of their lives was broken. She was sure that he would go.

"Is that marriage really never to be?" she asked her husband, with sad-voiced accents. "And does not Alice love him?"

"He said to me he did not want a patched-up life."

"Well. Our child must be happy. Our child must have her way."

And so they let the matter go for a time, and wandered off, lovers still, to the lime trees, and sat on a bench beneath their shade.

Perhaps if they had not always lived together in such an atmosphere of perfect understanding, they would have suspected the truth. But it never occurred to either that Alice had done herself a great injustice, and inconsiderately become her own enemy. It never occurred to that father and mother, whose love had from the first been without guile and perfect, that Alice, in the almost unconscious wantonness of power, had tried to grasp too much, and so lost all.

No voice said to the girl, "You have been wrong—even in your vexed anxiety you did wrong. When he told you that to him you were everything, by what right did you answer that he must prove to you that you would, under any circumstances, be more to him than Letty?" No friendly voice came to the girl's side, and helped her with wise questionings in her self-examination. In the labyrinth of perplexity, no guiding hand led her back into the wide way from which she had turned, perhaps in her pride. Those parent-lovers sat side by side, and wandered into the scented grove, linked close together; and because their own love had never known a cloud, or their happiness been dimmed by a misunderstanding, they had no suspicion of the truth—of the hopes and fears, the spectres of great loss, and the giants of desperate resolutions that were doing battle in the world where Alice sat alone separated from all sympathy, beyond the region of understanding, terribly alone.

Those two wandered out and home again, leaving their child, as they said, free: and being very sorry for Hugo.



CHAPTER XV.

ALICE IN WHITE.

Purification being the joy of pain.—E. BROWNING.



HEN Alice came downstairs dressed for the dinner at Trederrick she looked uncommonly lovely. Father and mother gazed at her with gratified eyes.

She looked round. Where was Hugo? She had determined to speak to him; to say something very wise and courageous; to tell him that—that—well, somehow or other it should come out. He should know that she loved him. Perhaps she would ask him *not* to love Letty. Certainly he should know that he had wounded her by speaking to her father. Where was Hugo? Her heart asked the question anxiously. Her lips could not utter the words.

The carriage drove to the door. Her mother got in. Alice, wondering, followed—then her father, and the door was shut. Her lips grew white. But in her very weakness there was desperation.

"Where is Hugo?" she spoke boldly enough now.

"Oh, he would not go with us. He went a few minutes since; go on now"—to the servant—"We shall be late."

The evening had turned suddenly cold. Alice shuddered. "What a gust of wind!"

"Yes, and rain. I hope Hugo won't get wet."

Then the coachman drove faster, and Alice, wrapping her Indian shawl closer round her, grew white as her dress, and wished herself at home.

When they reached Trederrick rain was pouring. They got out in a hurry, and Peter Drake met them in the hall. He was always very pleasant, even affectionate, in his manner to Mrs. Penwarne. Every old memory of the troubles of past times had grown mellow, and the acid had gone in the keeping.

"Welcome—always welcome; welcome above all others, Jane," he whispered, taking her hand. Then Colonel Penwarne followed them into the drawing-room, with Alice by his side.

Hugo was there, sitting by Letty and talking to her. Alice felt it before she saw it.

They began to talk to Lady Judith, who was looking gracious, less cold in manner than usual, and with an unwonted sort of animation, giving a strange light to her usually handsome but stony face.

"You look cold," she said to Alice, clad in shining white, with blush roses in her hair. A glance had already informed Alice that Letty was in pink, with pink and white hawthorn in shining braided locks. She sat listening to Hugo, with her beautiful face glowing, still, as she always was, quiet-eyed and gentle every way; but over her there was a glow of happiness and approval. She had never looked so beautiful—never, in Alice's eyes, before.

There were not many people there. Mr. and Mrs. Baynard, and the friends staying in the house, were all the party. In a minute Alice was talking to Lord Belton and Sophy Cereseau. When they went to dinner she found herself given to Lord Belton's care. Hugo had taken Letty. It was a cheerful dinner, full of talk. Peter talked well; and Lady Judith would have considered it beneath her dignity to be anything short of agreeable at her own table. She dealt in individual, not general, acidities. Besides, she prided herself on her qualities as a hostess, and her dinners were invariably good. Colonel Penwarne was delighting Lady Dynham by talking of the details of shawl embroidery, and the fabrication of gold chains; Lord Dynham bursting in on the animated descriptions by sudden questions, eliciting answers by which he crammed himself with second-hand observations on Indian textile fabrics.

Mrs. Penwarne sat on her brother's left hand, and they talked to each other under cover of the louder speaker's voices—old talk of old days, and Marian Teague and the panelled parlour.

"How beautiful she is!" thought her husband.

"She is as young as ever," meditated Peter; "and she makes me young too."

And Alice talked to Lord Belton, freely and pleasantly, very glad to talk to him, very glad to do anything that was not *thinking*.

She warmed him into animation. His interest rose. He talked in his turn, and she helped him to talk. No one could think that she cared for this youth with the downy lip and anxious eye and uncertain utterances. "He is a nice boy," thought Alice. She who had lived with strong men felt that he was no more, and she was very glad to have such easy work to do, with which she could fill every moment without fear or hesitation. So she talked, and made the happy youth talk too—she talked of Letty, and said how handsome and how good and clever she was; and Lord Belton blushed with delight, yet grew critical, and was not sure as to her being everything a gentle girl in his opinion ought to be. "She knows such a lot of mathematics, you know; and she translated a terribly hard passage for my father; why, as to Latin, it's just English to her; and she writes Greek. It's awful. It's all Mr. Drake's doing, you know."

"I don't think it has hurt her," said Alice.

"Well, I don't know. It makes a man feel foolish, somehow," said the youth with exquisite candour. "And I'm sure it makes her feel bored by a fellow's talk. But she can talk to Captain Penwarne. He is very educated too, my father says. I shouldn't think he knew as much Greek. He has been doing other things, you know;" and he laughed as at some imaginary joke.

"He has been doing a great many other things," said Alice, quietly; "and he is a man of great talent."

"She gets on with him, doesn't she?" And then they both glanced across at Letty. And Alice saw Letty meet Colonel Penwarne's eye at that very moment, and saw her father smile, as if he were glad that she should be making herself acceptable to Hugo. Alice went cold. Letty's face glowed again with, as it seemed, some great interior sense of happiness.

"Upon my life, she is handsome; so strangely quiet, and yet so very—very—you know; but not the least dull, or anything of that sort."

"Certainly not dull."

"Well, I never saw such a thing in all my life!"

"But you are not as old as Methuselah yet, you know." This was Alice's great venture to get the talk away from Letty, and back to herself.

"Now, I can't think why a fellow's being young should be a reason for thinking nothing of him," said Lord Belton, with

animation. "Everybody was young once. Many would be glad to be young again; and if it's a misfortune, why, it can't last long, and cure is certain. It is because I was never at a public school, nor yet at either of the Universities. That's it. People think me so young—but I can't help it. I shall get the better of that——" He was smiling upon Alice, and she thought how well she had succeeded in changing the topic of talk. She liked Lord Belton, though even to her he seemed to be unusually young. But when this youth of just twenty-one said to her with unquestionable drollery—"Why, *you* were young once!" she laughed a low, silvery laugh, which yet got tremulous, as if shaken by something that might have been a sob, as she answered, "Oh, yes; once. Such a short time ago. This morning before breakfast, I think."

Then it was Lord Belton's turn to laugh, and he did so pleasantly, for he had "got on" better with Alice than ever before with any one in all his experience of young ladies. She pleased him because she did not try to do so; and he felt a sudden desire—quite a new desire in the breast of this fair youth—a desire to stand well with her. "I don't want you to think me ignorant, you know."

"Indeed, I don't. I know you are not."

"You know?"

"Yes. On Captain Penwarne's authority. You know he likes you very much?"

"I like him. That makes one diffident! He is quite delightful. He has done and seen so much—knows so much—been everywhere—worked so hard; and he is so—so—so modest. I suppose that is not quite the right word though, for a man like him."

"Yes, it is," said Alice. "It is a word for a great man. My father is great. He, too, is just what you mean. Great men are humble men——"

"Always?" asked Lord Belton.

"Always, if truly great. A man is great because he knows what greatness is, and he aspires after it. He is humble, because no man with aspirations that are truly great ever satisfies them."

"Then he is at once a success and a failure," said Lord Belton.

"Please to go on. You have not said all you think and mean."

"It is the perseverance that——"

Alice shook her head. "Greatness includes perseverance. There is no failure. It is always greater and greater, and less and less. Is it a riddle?"

"It is the triumph of the better part. The strength that comes to the few."

"Thank you," said Alice. "My father is one of the few."

"And Captain Penwarne?"

"Yes."

Lady Judith moved off with her ladies. Lord Belton took the chair nearest to Hugo. "I never talked to any one so charming as Miss Penwarne," he said.

"She is about all that a woman ought to be, I suppose," said Hugo, with an air of odd indifference; and Lord Belton felt surprised.

But Alice's trials were not over. In the evening Mr. Drake wished for music, and she had to sing. She got so suddenly hoarse that she could not get on well—broke down at last, and people pitied her. Letty pitied her. Letty wondered why. Letty brought her lozenges, and advised her to wrap up well going home. But Mr. Drake would have music, and Mrs. Penwarne, whose voice was still as perfect as it had been twenty years before, was appealed to vehemently.

But she had made a resolution, and could not be persuaded to deviate from it. She never sang alone out of her own house. She could sing a duet. Would Sophy Cereseau sing? The music began. The singing went on. Mrs. Penwarne grew enthusiastic in the old home over the old songs. The world within those walls went fast and happily. Everybody was in a state of felicity, and only Alice felt alone—still alone, half-hidden, down by the curtained window, where she sat and looked out on the level sea, lying like a lake beyond the towering clms, on which the full moon spread her light, but which yet bore on its bright surface the dim shadows of dark clouds.

Suddenly a merry air struck out, and her mother and Hugo were singing:

"As it fell upon a day
In the merry, merry month of May,
Sitting in a pleasant shade
Which a grove of myrtles made."

Alice came out of her retirement to hear this duet—a thing so good, or so bad, so nonsensical or so full of feeling,

just as the power or the incapacity of the singers make it. It never was sung better than it was being sung at that moment. Alice smiled, holding herself in derision this "merry, merry month of May."

But when Hugo sang—

"That to hear her so complain
Scarce I could from tears refrain,
For her griefs so lovely shown
Made me think upon my own."

she asked herself, in genuine surprise, "I wonder if I am really forgotten?"

It was a question, however, that was not to be answered that night. The time for departure had come. And within the hour Lord Dynham had made those observations in reference to Hugo with which this chapter began.

And Alice had reflected too. She had humbled herself in the dust of self-reproach.

Where had been her love for Letty? Had she not felt angry shame at herself because Letty was so educated? Had she not felt mortified because the world could be happy without her? Of course the truth must lie in this—that Hugo did not really care for her. If he had really loved her, would he have so absented himself from her side all day, all evening? Would he have so talked to Letty before her eyes? "I have lost him—lost him!" wept Alice. "Surely he might have stayed as my brother—my friend. Was Marian Teague right, and was I proud? Did I want too much? Ought I to have been humble, and taken the great earthly good without exacting conditions? Oh! I know, I know quite well, that to have Hugo's love is to be rich for life."

So the girl wept and troubled. So she did penance for the fault she had committed. So she proved the truth of Marian Teague's hard saying, that heaven's blessings—such a blessing as a good man's love, which is to last for life, and is meant by the Giver of all good to sweeten life, and to steady with mutual strength the mingling footsteps through its difficult paths—is not to be taken and left just as fickle fancy moves one, or pride and the exaltation of self suggests. "It is the only gift of Paradise that has outlived the fall." What had Letty Drake to do with a gift that had been offered to Alice Penwarne?

In her self-reproach, in the exaggeration of all human

woe that comes on with darkness, and is surely one of the terrors of the night, Alice was prostrate with misery, stranded on life's shore, because she had lost Hugo. The great loss made her pause, and calculate the gains that were left to her. If Hugo's love would have made her rich for life, his loss had made her for ever poor. And then, up to that day, it seemed to her that in her love she had been free, and that now his great protecting influence being gone, the bondage of life had fallen upon her with a mighty weight, which, standing alone, she could scarcely endure.

Had she no one to go to? No one.

Life was empty. The world was void. Her father and mother were truth itself. They had never trifled with their love. They had lived from the first in the luxury of a perfect faith. They had proved from the beginning that to love is to be free—that the devotion to one another which they call a duty made all other duties light. They could not help her; they could not come out of their paradise; they could only give her a sublime, angelic pity; they could not give her back her joy, and she could only make them unhappy.

"It is my own trouble," she said. "I alone am to blame. I have to live, and I ought to be strong. It would weaken me to tell my trouble. I could tell it if I were going certainly to die. Then, I think, I should like Hugo to know the truth. But as I am to live, I had better repent of my jealousy of Letty Drake, and carry the cross quietly which my own hands have carved. As to Hugo's being unhappy, and, as my mother said, disappointed, I think I know Hugo; he would rather not be the victim of second thoughts. What a victim he would feel! 'On second thoughts, dear Hugo, yes.'"

Alice laughed cruelly at herself.

"He would never trust me—never believe me again though he would marry me as a matter of honour, of course. I wonder if a man can be *too strong*. Did ever Hugo or my father ever change their minds? They are so far human that they can say—'I was mistaken.' Then they never, either of them, think that thing again. There! I have got to the bottom of it now. That is just Hugo's state of mind about me."

As the girl made these meditations, purposely bringing her mind to the contemplation of facts, she sat with her face buried in her hands, at the table by her little oriel

window, where the heavy curtains shut out sight and sound. She rose up, and stood quite still for a moment. There came back to her memory the day when Hugo, at eighteen, in his first action, in the heats of India—for he had begun his soldier-life in the midst of troubled times—had been wounded, and how her mother had waited, worked, watched, and prayed. He was all her life then.

The mention of his name, when first it had appeared with honourable comments, had filled her with joy. He was all her life then, too.

Again, and even again, he had been in danger, struck down with fatigue, mentioned among the probable dead; lost—found—welcomed—crowned with love and praise. An honour to their name. Her father's strength in mortal need. Blessed with her mother's great, unutterable gratitude. And she had stood by in the dawn of her womanhood, and known then too that he was her own.

He had never spoken a lover's words to her—never in plain language said "marry me" till that morning; but he had given her his life, and she knew it. She had always known that when the hour came when he could marry, he would only marry her; and that then he would ask her. He had asked her that morning, and though she had spoken other words, the truth had been that she was angry and jealous about Letty Drake. She had forgotten his life, and only remembered Frederrick and Letty.

But *he* had not forgotten. His sun had gone out, as he had said to Colonel Penwarne.

And as to Letty, poor innocent Letty, she had her own world of enchantment to live in, and the magician was Cecil Carteray. She had suddenly been lifted up by a strong arm into the region of contentment and peace. Everybody shared in her joy, in a nameless way. She could be gentle and merciful and patient to the end of her days; and, whatever life brought her now, there would be peace.

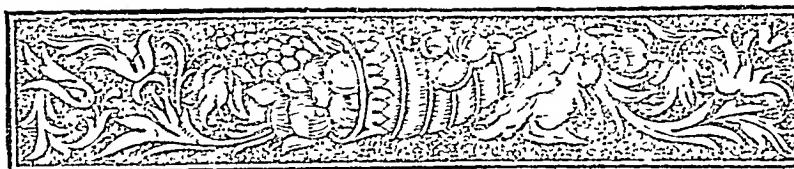
The next morning, when Letty Drake appeared, she found Cecil Carteray at the breakfast-table.

When Alice appeared she found that Hugo had made an engagement the night before to go somewhere very early with Mr. Baynard. He would be absent all day.

And our third friend, Sophy Ceresseau, who had quite passed through her experience, came down looking forth on life as a great blank. She had done with that luxury of grief that an ill-used girl may find some consolation in in-

dulging; she had discovered the utter uselessness of that cry—"I wish it had never happened." She had begun her life all over again but wrapped up in a disguise; made very prudent, and gifted with a new far-sightedness. The real Sophy Cereveau had become invisible; and would probably remain so for ever, unless some new day of love and feeling should dawn on her now idle existence, made up of moderate usefulness and plentiful sameness, and wake her up to a new life.





CHAPTER XVI.

ELEANOR BAYNARD'S KNITTING.

Seest thou shadows sailing by,
As the dove, with startled eye,
Sees the falcon's shadow fly?—LONGFELLOW.

"**O**H dear, how tiresome this knitting is! The stitches won't come right; and I took such pains to learn it. Letty Drake taught it to me." Mrs. Baynard made this murnur.

"You had better send for Miss Drake to do the work of teaching once more," suggested Cecil Carteray, who was standing by her.

He had breakfasted at Trederrick, and he was now making this proposal to Mrs. Baynard, wishing to see Letty again.

"I expect her. She told me last night she would come to-day, to see how I might be getting on."

Mrs. Baynard was sitting in a large bow-window, from which by four or five steps you could get to the wide grass terrace, where some flower-beds showed in the gay glory of the early spring. The garden at Mrs. Baynard's was always gay, for her husband was the greatest practical florist in all that country-side.

"Had you a pleasant party yesterday?" asked Cecil.

"Yes, very pleasant. How beautifully Mrs. Penwarne sings! Old associations seemed to give her youth back to her. She sang like nothing that one ever heard there before. She seemed to be ashamed of singing so splendidly. She half apologized, saying she knew the room so well, though she had not sung in it for twenty years. The echoes seemed to welcome her. Alice was hoarse. Captain Penwarne took the second in two or three duets. Then there was a trio and a quartet; Eustace sang, and Sophy Cerescau.

It was a very pleasant party—the only thoroughly pleasant one I ever had at Trederrick.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, indeed yes. You know they are stiff—unkind, if not unmeaning.”

“But I know no such thing. I have met with great kindness there; a little stiff, perhaps; but as to unmeaning—what is it? I am always full of meaning there, I assure you.”

“I believe you mean Mr. Drake to die—he often looks very ill—and to be Lady Judith’s second.”

“If you had said Miss Drake’s first, you would have said a civiler thing.” On which Cecil looked hard at Mrs. Baynard, by way of discovering what she might really think of that possibility.

“Ah, but Letty will marry Hugo Penwarne.”

“What makes you say that?” And Cecil turned round and took up a telescope which lay on a table behind him, and began to adjust it to his sight.

“I say it because I know it.”

“But how do you know it?”

“I know it because I feel it.”

“It is an odd line of reasoning. May I ask why you feel it?”

“Yes; because I saw it.”

“When?”

“Yesterday.”

Cecil looked through the telescope.

“And they would like it.”

“Who?”

“Her father and mother. They could not help liking it. It would secure Trederrick to Letty.”

“I know,” said Cecil, “that Lady Judith has sometimes dwelt with very natural fear on her husband being the first to die.”

“Oh, nonsense, Cecil! Don’t be so unreal. Sometimes—sometimes? *Always*, I assure you. And she expects to outlive him. She!—and she is I don’t know how many years older. I do believe that Lady Judith never thinks of the possibility of her own death. She is one of that hard, ruling, managing nature, that her not being immortal can’t occur to her. She arranges what is to happen when everybody else dies; but the world without her is quite beyond her conception. She was, however, almost agreeable

last night. She made the nearest approach to being like other people that I ever knew her to accomplish. Of course one saw the cause. Hugo Penwarne was Letty's humble servant, and Letty herself looked like an angel."

Cecil smiled, and put down the telescope. "Only the other day you declared that they wanted her to marry Lord Belton," he said.

"So her mother did. But the Dynhams would never have allowed it. And letters have passed between Coombe and Trederrick."

"What about? How do you know?"

"It is no secret. Mr. Drake told Eustace. Something, I don't know what, made Colonel Penwarne say, as a matter of form, that in case of his succeeding to Trederrick, all that entailed property would be left to Hugo. When Mr. Drake asked us to dine there, he said he had just received and answered this letter. He never mentioned Letty's name; but what he was thinking of was quite plain without speech. Obviously it would be the best match for both, if they themselves think so. Captain Penwarne is a very remarkable man."

"He is an excellent man," said Cecil, with emphasis—"But who is this?"

The gleam of a silk parasol was seen among the trees, and Alice appeared on the lawn before the window. "Am I forgiven for coming across the turf?" she said.

"And there is Letty, too," exclaimed Mrs. Baynard.

"Oh, I am so glad; you will settle your knitting now," said Cecil Carteray.

"It was on account of the knitting that I came," said Letty simply, and she spoke the exact truth; but Alice had come through quite a different inspiration, so she said nothing.

The breakfast at Coombe without Hugo had been a rather constrained affair. Alice had felt that her father had spoken of Hugo to her mother, not in order to instruct that lady, who had probably already learnt all about the absent man that was intended to be known, but for the sake of giving information to herself. This had made her feel disagreeably conscious. But she had listened eagerly nevertheless.

Hugo had made an arrangement to go on a day's fishing with Mr. Baynard, after dinner the night before at Trederrick. They were to go perhaps fifteen miles away, to

certain deserted pits, which had once been excavated in search of tin. Tin pits, thus left, after many years, filled with water and become inhabited by a very fine sort of trout, with certain interesting peculiarities of spots and colour very delightful to the fisherman. Mr. Baynard was an ardent lover of the fisherman's sport, and in the old years—the schoolboy years of Hugo Penwarne—he had taken the boy out and instructed him in many mysteries. Suddenly the desire had arisen to go again, and revive in the most practical manner the memories of the past time. But after Hugo had left Coombe at an early hour to join Mr. Baynard, who was going to drive to that small inn, The Traveller's Rest, on Rhuby Moor, he had sent back for a change of clothes, and apparel for the night, with a message intimating that they might be away for a day or two, or more.

Alice had had a long parley with her inner self on the meaning of Hugo's arrangements. Had they reference solely to pink-spotted trout, or to herself? Was it to avoid her that he left Coombe for Rhuby Moor? If he went away on her account, what did it mean? That he was too disappointed to endure her in his sight?—or too—

But Alice could not dwell for an instant on the other alternative. Hugo was feeling himself dismissed. Hugo had certainly given up hope. Hugo was lost.

The result of all her wondering and silent argumentation of the whole question again and again was, that she walked off to the Rectory, and appeared there as we have seen.

"So you have lost Mr. Baynard," she said, after speaking to Cecil Carteray and Letty.

"Yes; and he has robbed you of Captain Penwarne. I am very glad you have come, I wanted to see some of you to say how their plans got changed at the last moment. Just as they were going to start, Joe came—you know Mrs. Graham? Her boy, I mean."

"Oh, yes; I saw her only yesterday."

"The sight of him reminded Eustace that he had promised the boy to take him when he went again. The boy had so thoroughly believed him, and had so looked forward to it, that on seeing the gig brought out he put his fists in his eyes and began to cry. He is a capital boy—very manly for ten years old; quite an ally of my husband's, and the sight was more than he could bear. Joe's tears are worse than other people's tears, you know—much worse. He never cried under the rod, depend upon it; but now he

cried because his faith in Eustace was gone. Wouldn't it have been dreadful for so young a child to have disbelieved in all human nature evermore, as he would have done undoubtedly? I am so glad he came up. And it was only an old newspaper that brought him."

"And what happened next?" asked Cecil, smiling.

"Why, Eustace confessed his fault, and begged his pardon, and offered reparation. They exchanged the old gig for a four-wheel with two seats, and having sent back the horse to wait in the stable, they sat down to breakfast. Before they had done Joe had come back, trusting and beautified. They then determined on having one long day at the fishing to-morrow, if it should be fine, and getting back in the evening, or the next day. We are not to expect them to-morrow night after the clock has struck ten."

"How like Mr. Baynard!" exclaimed Letty.

"Thank you, my dear; I know that means praise."

Then Cecil seemed to have forgotten all about the knitting; he was walking off with Letty towards the flower-beds. "Come back, if you please, Letty, my stitches are wrong."

She came back in her tranquil way, with her still, calm smile; she took the work in her hand, unravelled a quantity of thread, wound it all up again, and then began some such jargon as—knit one, slip two, bring the thread to the front, now two together. "Alice, write it down, please."

"Oh! dear, does nobody ever go mad?" cried Cecil impatiently.

"No, sir; we only lose our way, and find long ladders where there ought to be plaiting and purling. There, I have learnt it now; you can go where you please for a quarter of an hour. I shall be sure to have done it all wrong again by that time; so then, Letty, come back. Dear me, is that Laura?"

Mrs. Baynard's little girl ran past the window as fast as she could go.

"I should think she would be in the pond, under the water-lily leaves, in two minutes, at that rate." And so saying, Cecil started off in pursuit.

"Oh! there is no danger, the child knows," said Mrs. Baynard. "Go and say so, Letty." So Letty left the room, and followed by the way the child had taken. Just beyond the shrubs she met Cecil.

"She was only going to the nurse. I really thought she

might not have been able to stop herself if she got to the slope." Then he said, "I hoped to have spoken to your father this morning. But, somehow, I felt that it would not do. You know—my darling, we must not make mysteries with each other—you know it may not be a very easy matter to carry through with the sweetness that, in the future, it would be pleasant to look back upon."

"I know," she said.

"Once I thought I would speak to your mother first. I know she likes me. But I have changed my mind. Your father must have his rights."

"Oh! yes." All her devotion to her father came out in her voice, and showed in her manner, as she uttered her simple "Oh! yes." Cecil paused to look at her. His admiration, devotion, and happiness were at a sublime height. He had known her many years—quite from her childhood. She had been the hope of his life; there were not so many words to say as there might have been if he had loved a newly-found damsel; but this one, this lady of his heart, knew all that words could tell. She, too, was very happy, for she had found out everything. She had discovered the truth. The source of his strength had been herself, and the intention of winning her. Now she was won, how every cloud had passed away from off the path of her own life, and she, too, walked serenely in the light.

It was all in her beautiful face, her quiet face, her large, soft, promising faithful eyes. He loved her as strong men, of a certain sort of character, full of determination, and great in patience, love. It would have hurt this man very much to have been disappointed, she thought. He had been slow to speak for fear of this possible hurt; it would crush and ruin the best part of him to be deceived. But there was no sign of any possible change in Letty's face. He looked in it for faith and trust, and there he found what he sought.

"Things may be a little hard to manage. I must speak to your father. And I must ask his leave to make my own way with your mother. Will not that be best?"

"Yes; that will be the best way."

"They will be sorry to part with you. They may have other views—Lord Belton."

"No, no," and she laughed a low, sweet, momentary little laugh, which made Cecil stop speaking to admire her; and then he went on—

"And you are young. They may say that we must wait."

"I can wait."

"I *must* wait, perhaps. But as to means—I can marry now. Let no talk of money come between us."

"Oh, no."

"As to the time of asking your father, I wished to do it this morning, but somehow I could not get the suitable moment; so I came here, and hoped to see you somehow, somewhere."

"Don't speak till Lord and Lady Dynham are gone."

"When will that be?"

"In three weeks."

"So long?"

"I am quite sure that when we are alone will be the right time. And I should like it best."

"Very well. In less than six weeks I shall again be in London."

"They have engagements which oblige them to leave us at the end of three weeks. Let us be alone. Let us get back into our own usual quiet ways. Then come and——"

"You are right. I have no doubt you are right. And you love me, Letty?"

She never spoke; only looked at him, as if he might read in the quiet depths of those guileless eyes more than any spoken words could tell him.

"Still, I should like to hear you say it."

"I have said it."

"Only once."

"More than once;" and then she smiled.

"But I like the words."

"Words!—what are words?"

"Well, words are things we have been told."

"I could dispute it," she said softly.

"But I must have what I want."

"I love you, Cecil."

"How much?"

"How *can* I tell?"

"Past words?" he was smiling triumphantly now.

"Haven't I said, 'what are words?'"

Then they began to walk towards the house. Suddenly she said, "How much do you love *me*?" and she stopped short just before coming out from the shelter of the shrubs to the open green before the house.

He looked at her, surprised at her question. "Haven't I told you? So far I have talked, and you have listened."

"My home, my life is not as the homes and the lives of other girls. There may come trials which even you, though you know us so well, have never thought of. Very unexpected things may happen in our house—scorn, anger, and the two-edged sword of strong command, and very cruel, bitter words. It is the thought of that which makes me wonder how much you love me." She walked on, out into the open sunshine.

"I am a fit husband for any woman. I should not care for any words not spoken by yourself. Your father is a kind father and a just man; never carried away——"

"Never," she said, looking into Cecil's face. "I could put my life into his hands. You will never know—nothing could ever tell you what he has been to me, what he is, what he ever shall be. I put my life in his hands."

"As to anything else, then, I would marry you in the face of it, if you would let me. Would you?"

"Yes." She said only that one word; but Cecil knew that he might have to play a desperate game for her. They walked straight up to the open window. "After Lord Dynham leaves you, then?" he said, once more. And again Letty said "Yes."

"And you are come back just in time," Mrs. Baynard said. "I have got all the pattern wrong again. Have I perseverance and patience enough to conquer this knitting?"

"Of course you have. Those virtues form the larger portions of the various good qualities that make up a woman."

In the absence of these lovers, Mrs. Baynard and Alice had not been losing their time in fruitless silence.

"Lady Judith was almost pleasant last night," began Mrs. Baynard. Then she grew red with vexation. "Oh, Alice, I beg your pardon, she is your aunt."

"And I am so undutiful a niece that I agree with you entirely. But she seemed to be inclined to be civil to everybody yesterday, though she told me at once that I looked cold, that I was foolish to wear white when everybody wanted a fire, that blush roses at this time of the year were ridiculous, and that she wondered my mother did not select my adornment with more sense."

"Oh, and I thought you looked so well—only tired a little just at first. Then Lord Belton seemed to have raised your spirits by his dinner-table talk."

"He said he had never been at a public school or at Oxford. Why didn't they send him somewhere?"

"He was a precious child—their only one. Nothing satisfied them. But he is not ignorant, and he has very good abilities. He is only backward in self-confidence, and that will come soon enough. He is a very good boy, and he will be a bright, good man in five years' time. He is not learned and great after his style, as Cecil Carteray is, or a man such as education, circumstances, and great necessities make—Hugo for instance. Neither is he like my husband. But then Lord Belton is not called to live their lives; he has his own character, which is a very able one, and he will adorn his own life well, you will see."

"You know I never disparaged him," said Alice.

"No, my dear; but I liked saying what I said, and so said it. Lady Judith has wanted him to marry Letty. But then Letty scorned him; and it was wrong, and I scolded her. He could not help admiring her, of course. Now Lady Judith passes him over, and makes one wonder how anybody can bear her—her——"

"Fickleness," suggests Alice.

"No, not fickleness. A person may be fickle and not false. Fickleness may be an infirmity, but falsity is a crime. Every one may be true."

This was Mrs. Baynard's strong conviction. And she had a strong conviction also that Lady Judith was a thoroughly insincere woman—knowingly insincere; insincere to serve her own purposes, and changeable for her own ends, with the cruelty of malice, though she might only have acted from selfishness.

"If everybody may be true, I think it must also be a crime to be fickle."

"No; a fickle person is a person of weak judgment. While they like, they are true. They would be true in liking pink better than any other colour, while they were looking at pink. They change and prefer blue. It is a weakness, and weaknesses are very mischievous. Never have anything to do with fickle people. Loneliness is better than a fickle friend. Fickle people vex their neighbours, but false people spread devastation, and bring condemnation on themselves."

"I think it may be very difficult to be sincere," said Alice.

"Never difficult to you, dear girl," said Mrs. Baynard.

"But avoid all insincerity, as you would avoid the plague."

Oh, dear! I have dropped my stitches again. No, you need not do it. There is Letty and Cecil. I suppose they are watching the fishing-boats. How quiet it looks out there in the bay! such a sleepy scene."

Then Letty came to the window, and sat down on the steps outside, and Alice thought within her heart that she had been insincere on the bridge—most boastfully, cruelly insincere—when she had told Hugo that she would not break her heart if he loved Letty. And then she justified herself. "How could I have guessed that he would care so much, when he was gazing after the kingfisher?" And somehow she felt that she hated all kingfishers, and wondered why they had ever been made.





CHAPTER XVII.

CONSIDERATION.

The book of female logic is blotted over with tears ; and Justice in their courts is for ever in a passion.—THACKERAY.

AFTER Hugo had told his disappointment to Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne, he began to say to himself, "What next?"

He need not start for India for a year ; indeed, his time in England might safely be extended to rather more than that space of time. But as to living in the continual presence of Alice Penwarne, that was simply impossible. Hugo never for one moment doubted that he had suffered himself to deceive himself. He loved Alice so well that he could not blame her. It was far pleasanter to blame himself.

On returning from the dinner-party at Trederrick, he had gone to the smoking-room at Coombe, to join Colonel Penwarne, as was their frequent custom, in a half hour's consumption of cigars. He had not felt that he cared much for the "weed," but he had a very strong feeling that he would not separate himself from the man whom he had loved all his life, and obeyed as if he had been his father.

When he entered the room Colonel Penwarne was already there, and his face lighted up with a glad welcome.

"I was just thinking if you would come. That's right," he said. So they sat down and smoked.

First of all, Hugo spoke of his fishing engagement with Mr. Baynard.

"Baynard's an excellent man," said Colonel Penwarne.

"Yes, how the village people like him ! They are quite proud of him and Mrs. Baynard—Miss Eleanor as was—I delight in hearing them say it. And—he's a real gentleman.

he is,—to which I can agree with all my heart—‘han’el an oar like the best on us.’ And then old Gedds is grand in his descriptions of the lady. ‘A sweet chip out of the heart of the good old block. There was never any body who could beat the Goodman family, unless it was the Penwarne. But they were ever friendly. They went out together under King Charles, and are hearts of oak altogether!’”

“Yes; the village talk is very fine. They go on just as they did when I was a boy. Perhaps now old Davies is dead the talk may change.”

“And there are a good many more people in the world than there used to be; so I am informed at the blacksmith’s shop,” said Hugo, with quiet humour; “and mingling chronicles may get hard to keep.”

Then there was silence. Both of them felt that they had to say serious things before their cigars were out.

“When I come back from our fishing, I shall go to town,” said Hugo. “It’s best to be away just now.”

“What you do I will believe to be best,” said Colonel Penwarne.

“It is best to get myself out of sight. You know I suffer. I can’t help suffering. I have thrown my life away. I have waked in a dream, and I must get accustomed to the waking. You can have no idea how cast-away I feel.”

“I do not know what my wife and I may feel if we are to lose you. I have watched your footsteps from *then* till *now*.”

“Don’t speak so. I don’t want to be made soft-hearted.”

“Try again, Hugo. Give—give——” his voice quite trembled; he loved this young man so truly, and liked to keep this noble nature by his side—“give,” he said—“give *me* another chance.”

It was a terrible way of putting it. It struck on Hugo’s heart, and his answer came very gently from his lips. “There is nothing there to have, sir. Nothing that I want. All the asking in the world won’t make what does not exist. She schemed my marrying Letty; told me I could come back to her in the future if that did not do; said that, if it *did* end in a marriage with Letty, she would not break her heart. In fact, *she did not believe me*. She could not believe what I told her of my love for her; how it had always been; how I had looked to nothing else but herself as my reward, to crown my life. I was quite plain with her. But she had no comprehension of what I meant. And in that sense I say that she did not believe me. There was nothing in her

own heart to throw any light on what had been the life of mine. How could I ask her again? You know what I want. It is not there to have."

"I suppose not," said Colonel Penwarne.

"I am glad of these quiet moments," Hugo went on. "It was difficult to keep myself in order when I spoke to you this morning. I have thought of nothing else all day. So I think I will go to London. And perhaps on to Edinburgh. I have always wanted to go there. I may come back as I please, I suppose?"

"My dear boy, nothing parts *us*."

"Well, then, I *will* come back before long. Before going north, perhaps. And that's enough to say now."

"And I hope you have forgiven Peter Drake," said the Colonel, with a droll face.

"Oh yes; highly flattered. Pray say so, if you please, with my—I don't know what."

"Take care. Perhaps I may."

Then they parted; and the Colonel slept. But Hugo lay awake, vexing himself, in spite of the soothing influences to which he had been subjected for half the night.

Then came action, the best thing for any one in Hugo's circumstances; and he got up early to join Mr. Baynard.

When Alice found that she was not to see Hugo on that day, she felt more than ever that she was left stranded on life's shore. It was a strange, almost an unendurable feeling. She had determined the day before to speak to Hugo. She had not made up her mind as to what she should say, but she had a clear certainty in her mind that, after a few words, things would get right. In her eyes he had already proved himself sufficiently by his state of serious despair. That his state was serious she knew, from her father's manner to her; and despair was the true name, read by the light of her mother's countenance, for his disappointment. But she never doubted her power to put it right. She was beginning to repent, and when she lay down to rest she had been very angry with herself, and longing to make reparation.

But, it was dreadful, after this determination to set things right, somehow, not to see Hugo. It was heart-breaking, after all this misery and humiliation, to find Hugo gone, never to be able to get a chance of speaking to him—it frightened her. No other word could express her state of mind. She stood still, scared, asking of herself, what have

I done? Her eyes were always filling with tears. As to living in uncertainty about Hugo's return, she really couldn't, so she set off walking to the Vicarage, and there learnt the circumstances of Mr. Baynard's departure, and the possibilities that would rule the term of his absence. Of course Hugo would stay as long as Mr. Baynard stayed. A day of rain—a promise of uncommon success—any fact or any fancy might keep them to the end of the week. It put her into a passion of irritation to think what mere trifles were racking her life—her poor clouded life—making miserable her wretched, repentant, frightened heart. It might never come right now—never; and all because *time* was passing; and a stupid boy, like silly little Joe, and a drive on a fine day, and a foolish mania for pink-spotted trout, were combining to deprive her of the opportunity on which all her future depended.

"Eustace will be here on Friday night, or very early on Saturday morning at the very latest," her friend had said; and with such news Alice was obliged to rest contented.

Mr. Baynard was all that the villagers described him to be, and he was possessed of the kindest and largest of hearts. His activity of body was almost uncontrollable. He was always *doing*. It suited the taste of those among whom he lived. He was a man who did not know fear in his heart, nor fatigue in his body; and he was bright in manners, and handsome in face. The best of husbands and fathers; living in a lovely house, with a very pretty wife, and a well-filled purse. Blessings had been raining down on Eustace Baynard pretty steadily all his life; and it was his nature to look around for those who might like to "go shares." There was no possibility of his enjoying anything by himself. So the idea of Hugo, under the pressure of any conceivable circumstances short of fire, sword or sudden death, leaving him, to return by himself, was quite inadmissible.

Alice therefore sat very still, speaking to her own heart—"Nobody knows when I may see him again. After many days to speak will be impossible. How different it would have been if I could have seen him for five minutes before he went by himself to Trederrick." And then—"He never spoke to me all the evening. Never wondered why I could not sing. Talked to Letty." Then she waked up to Mrs. Baynard saying, "How well Hugo's voice goes with your mother's." And she could scarcely command her voice to say, "Yes."

Letty came in, and Cecil Carteray came immediately after her. They all talked together, and Mrs. Baynard again mastered the mystery of the difficult knitting.

"It is not too warm for a walk. Shall we all go up to the downs? There will be a fine breeze there, and a lovely view; the horizon is very clear to-day, after the thunder-shower last evening."

Letty said she could not go—she must return to Trederrick. She began to say "good-bye."

"I will go with you to the entrance-gate," said Cecil.

It seemed to be only a necessary politeness. No one said anything. Then Mrs. Baynard and Alice were left alone.

"I am very glad that you and Letty take to each other. It used to be rather stiff work when you were children. Miss Teague was stiff for you, not improperly, and Lady Judith stiff for herself."

"But Uncle Drake always did his best. Even then I used to know that. Letty was a silent, watchful sort of child; I did not know her then. Afterwards, when I joined my parents in India, I almost forgot her. My mother used to write to Uncle Peter, but he seldom mentioned Letty in his answers. He used to speak of the boy who died. When we came home, therefore, it was like making a new acquaintance. To see Letty, however, was to like her. I think her a very interesting character—not at all like other people."

"Her circumstances have been unlike other people's. She was forgotten while her brother lived. She was an odd, silent, beautiful, self-sufficing child. That was all wrong, you know. When the boy died, I think Lady Judith almost loathed Letty. I have heard her say passionate words as to her loss, and her wonder why, if one was to go, it couldn't have been the girl. But still, at first, in her sorrow, I felt kindly to her. I knew, or thought I knew, what that sorrow was. I said something once, and, oh! Alice, she—she smiled; I never got over that. No look ever before conveyed such an idea of what the concentrated essence of pride and impertinence might be. It was too insulting, too harrowing. Lady Judith *would* and *will* stand alone. Even a mother's love must be a thing of loneliness with her. But really I ought not—she is your aunt. I am always behaving ill. Please don't be injured by my company, my dear."

"I am not likely to suffer. Hugo and I can't help being saucy over Lady Judith. She is as odd and inconsistent in her treatment of him as of every one else."

"All that will cease now. She has fixed on him for Letty. They talk of it. Mr. Drake would never have said a word on the subject if his wife had not consented. And I should be so glad of a little happiness for Letty. There is a strange difference between you two girls. You are independent of outside pleasures, and so is she; but you have had too much, and she too little. You are independent because you are never likely to get anything better than your daily food; she is independent because she has learnt to live upon nothing."

"Oh! Uncle Peter's love is great, How can you talk of nothing?"

"The power of loving, the delight in being loved, comes to us through mothers. A girl loved by a father is only half taught, and destitute of all knowledge of the depths of a woman's heart. A girl can't measure her own heart; and she is only a girl. But if she has a mother, a loving mother, who is also a loving wife, she has a wholesome knowledge of what love is, and may very naturally have a wholesome ambition to be in another home what her mother is in hers. But, poor Letty, poor dear Letty!—Lady Judith is not only unmotherly, she is unnatural. It makes me shiver to hear and see her scorn for Mr. Drake's care over Letty. I have beheld her drive the girl away from her; and she has treated Mr. Drake with contempt before the girl's eyes. Letty's life has been a cruel experience. I wish she had a home of her own; and the only subject since the boy's death on which Mr. Drake and his wife have agreed, is that they should like her to marry Hugo. I always praise her to Hugo. I gave a last charge to Eustace to do his best in that matter, if any proper occasion came. It is the only love affair I ever tried to help on. Everybody ought to like it."

It seemed to Alice as if she were freezing where she sat. Her words to Miss Teague came back to her, and Miss Teague's answer. She had said that Letty should have her chance, and she had had a rebuke; but she had said it for her own purposes, never really believing in Letty's success, but only in her own triumph.

She felt as if a stone had been suddenly set rolling, and as if she had lost the one, the only opportunity that ever could be hers of stopping it.

She had once heard some one say that men's hearts were often easily caught on the rebound; that, after an un-

expected hard hit, they often fell back with force into the hand that chance held out. She had certainly lost Hugo.

She sat, hardly able to conceal her trembling. "Ah, I am going to be ill, as I was yesterday at breakfast," she said to herself, in great alarm. But she contrived to get up, and say that she ought to go. "Oh, yes, please. Before Mr. Carteray comes back, or he will have to take me home too."

Mrs. Baynard laughed, and then let her go.

"She is a very charming girl, and, in her own way, almost as beautiful as Letty." She delivered this opinion to Cecil when he returned, and he agreed with her cordially.

For many years of her life, Alice kept a vivid recollection of this morning at the Vicarage, when she had first found out that the idea of Hugo marrying Letty was an idea that had got beyond the mind of Uncle Peter and the audience round their own breakfast-table. It had grown in a few hours into the proportions of a recognised good—a thing for people outside their own home to talk of and hope for, and to help on if they could. It had all, only the day before, been placed in her hands to change, and to gather into her own power for ever; and now it was already a thing that her hands were too weak to grasp; and it had got to be more than she could hold. One moment of proud trifling with a solemn thing had done it. Half-a-dozen insincere sentences had changed her life.

"Was I insincere?" So, as she walked home, Alice went on with her self-examination. "Was I insincere? I said to Miss Teague that I knew my own nature; that if he did not prove himself in this trial, I should never believe. Was I true?"

She gave the judgment against herself, with bitter upbraidings. "What right had I? What right had I?" Over and over again she told herself she had had no right to dictate terms to a man such as Hugo Penwarne. Terms imply suspicion; suspicion, possible falsity. Oh! horrible, Hugo false!—Hugo, whom she had known literally all her life!

She went unseen to her room. She stayed there the greater part of the day. She blessed Marian Teague for coming in the evening; and she went to bed early, with a nervous headache.

"She was not well last night," said her mother, "There

was a sudden change of weather—there was thunder in the air.”

But Marian Teague looked grave and feared, and went very near to guessing the truth.

Undoubtedly Hugo's disappointment had been at once great and complete. He had had no other purpose throughout his manhood than to make Alice his wife. His meaning had been so clear, so enduring, and so always in the front, as it were, that for others not to know it had been impossible. They had known it. Ignorance certainly Alice could not have pleaded; and Hugo remembered, with something of bitterness, that she had not attempted to plead it. Colonel Penwarne had always known what Hugo's feelings were. He had helped to bring him up in the idea. It had been acknowledged and respected always, though he had never been made to feel that he was in bondage to it.

Mrs. Penwarne had known and lovingly accepted Hugo's life-long homage to her child. When Colonel Penwarne, a short time before, had spoken of it to her, and proposed speaking to Hugo, she had prevented anything being done, not because she doubted Hugo, nor, indeed, Alice either, but because she would have her child make sure of his still being her choice now, amidst changed scenes and new surroundings. She never doubted how it would be in the end; she only wanted the perfect satisfaction that would grow out of events being allowed to take their natural course. And, in truth, when Hugo told her that he had been refused, that Alice had no such deep worshipping love for him as he had for her, she was shocked—grieved, too; but most of all, deeply shocked.

Hugo's question—“Why did she accept all my life, if this was to be the end?” could find no answer. Hugo had been a man with a meaning. Had Alice lived without a meaning? Had she played with a good man's life, as a mouse is played with by its well-fed tormentor, a happy, home-loving cat?

And so Hugo went off with his friend, feeling that the one great thing that he had been meaning all his life had shrivelled up, and was gone, like a piece of burnt paper. He felt as one watching it, as spark after spark lighted up, just to show him the general blank, and then spark after spark died out. So he wondered and watched, past happy moments brightening up—dying out; but he was left without his story. Alice had destroyed it; the meaning was lost, and the thing no longer was. A vexed memory

alone remained. And Alice, because sixteen miles of wood and waste lay between beautiful Coombe and the trout-filled water-pits on Rhuby Moor, wept herself ill in a passion of annoyance, and yet took comfort from a determination to seize the earliest possible moment, and speak to Hugo the instant he returned. The question what she should say never occurred to her. Surely the time had not gone for ever when a smile could bring him to her side—when one pleasant, playful word would be enough to reopen the great question, and give life back into her hands once more! Then she would speak—then she would say—“Oh but I am not at all the wise woman I pretended to be. If you love Letty, I shall die.” Then he—— So the book of life lay open, and Alice wrote.





CHAPTER XVIII.

HELPING ON.

But Oswald never knew those ancient laws,
The awe that beauty does in lovers breathe,
Those short-breathed fears and paleness it does cause,
When in a doubtful brow their doom they read.

HUGO PENWARNE had followed his fishing for the three days' stay at the Travellers' Rest as energetically as for the space of three minutes on the bridge in the midst of his love-making, he had pursued with his eyes the flight of the kingfisher. He was a man of action as well as of meaning. Such are always the best kind of men. With him love would *rule* life, not *be* life. The loss of Alice's love—if that can be called loss to him who has convinced himself that he never had it—might change life, but no loss that life could bring would make him less than a man—and a very strong man too.

He had, by the time he was driving home with Mr. Baynard, turned the trouble over and over, held it in every light, and examined it in all possible ways. His verdict was that he had been mistaken. "She is the best girl in the world. She is as true as the sun, and as transparent as the light. She has always loved me in a dear, fond, sisterly way. She would even marry me, if either I could not bring up my courage to ask Letty, or if that young lady refused me. She would even marry me! Yes, even that! Because she has so good an opinion of my character in general, and myself in particular—because she likes my history, and has hoped and feared over my life; and had sensations of honour and glory coming to her and hers, through my good luck or successes. Yes; she is the best girl in the world, but *she*

does not love me! And I? I have cared for no one but Alice. I can't do with less than a just exchange. Heart for heart. Poor Alice! Poor me! What a life we might have had! She little guesses how I loved her—how I could have given her a man's best worship all the days of my life—or hers; no, there is no question of her life. If she were to go first, I should worship her still. But now, what next? Clearly I had better be off."

So far he had got as he drove home with Mr. Baynard.

Now, the drive being just a little too long for their horse to take it comfortably without baiting, it was Mr. Baynard's custom on these excursions to rest for a short time at a wayside place of entertainment for man and beast, which stood conveniently just about half the distance between Rhuby Moor and the village of Trederrick. While thus resting, he and Hugo strolled away to a granite tor which rose up majestically across the uncultivated land; and there, after a little wandering over the stones so strangely poised, and the hollow basins, large and small, made by the rain through centuries of uncounted time, they found a resting-place; and with their backs against the granite warmed by the sun, and their feet among dry moss and springing heath, they began to talk.

Mr. Baynard had been quite willing to obey his wife's injunction and "help on" any liking that might exist in Hugo's breast for Letty. But the injunction had been given before it had been known that Joe was to be one of the party, and occupy the back seat in the pony-carriage. He had not forgotten the subject. But he had had no chance of speaking upon it.

Now, however, the opportunity had come, and the present time seemed to be an eminently favourable moment for such a discussion as he anticipated.

"Hugo, I am more than ten years older than you are——"

"Twelve," said Hugo; "I'm twenty-eight."

"Exactly. I was married at twenty-four."

"That was luck, I should say. Very few marry so soon, and generally I should say it was too soon. Of course, if a man is in love, and in love with such a woman as Mrs. Baynard, the sooner he does it the better. He can't improve on *that* luck. He had better therefore win the game when he can."

"At twenty-eight, every man in an independent position should think of marriage. As a general rule, I mean, of course."

"I wonder if I am independent," said Hugo, kicking off a magnificent piece of moss with the tip of his heavy boot, and making a foot-ball of it.

"Don't go out to India again unsettled on the subject of a wife."

"Lest, on coming home, I should fare like the——" and Hugo began to sing—

——'late Governor of Trincomalee;
Yellow were his guineas and so were his cheeks,
And he would not do for me.'

"I think you might marry Letty Drake," said Mr. Baynard.

"And possess myself of all my great-great-grandmother's vast estates. But before doing that I shall have to kill Colonel Penwarne; and what would become of the world after that? He is the best man in it. It would have to be given up, in Mrs. Ferris's sense—'Ah, Captain, I gie'd up the world long ago. It's a bad work-'ous lot.'"

"Colonel Penwarne, in the natural order of things, will die before Mr. Drake, on which it will all be Letty's."

"Colonel Penwarne will live for ever. He is made of pure gold, and no material wears so long, or keeps its value so perfectly."

"Then your marriage with Letty would be but a decent way of re-endowing her with her father's lands."

"There is something in that, certainly," said Hugo. "But I think Colonel Penwarne could give it back to her without the ceremony of any human sacrifice. It's a style of worship which I believe never commends itself to the victim."

"But Letty would not accept of so great a gift from any one."

"Then she would, in refusing, have her own way; which is what she would prefer to all the world."

"You won't be serious," said Mr. Baynard.

"I won't be sold," said Hugo. Whereupon that conversation ceased, and when Mr. Baynard got home he could not say for certain whether he had "helped on" the matter in hand or not.

When Hugo got back to Coombe it was about six o'clock in the evening. He found Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne in the drawing-room; Alice was in the adjoining room waiting her opportunity, and the door between the rooms was open.

"Lord Belton has been here," said Mrs. Penwarne. "He

brought a note from Trederrick. They want you to dine there."

Hugo took up the invitation, which was addressed to him in Lady Judith's hand-writing.

Not to think at such a moment of the conversation with Mr. Baynard was, of course, impossible. It was a very civil little note. It said that a few friends—gentlemen—were to drive there. "Belton had met two of his acquaintances on a tour, and they were coming over from Newton. Would Captain Penwarne join the party thus unceremoniously brought together?"

"I suppose I must go. I can't plead as an excuse my fatigue after the fishing."

"We accepted it for you," said Mrs. Penwarne.

"Write a note, and let James go down the crag-path with it," said the Colonel, whose natural gifts of order and accuracy were felt in every detail of life.

So Hugo wrote to "Dear Lady Judith," and said that he would wait upon her; and that he sent trout from the ponds on Rhuby Moor caught that morning. He hurried out of the room. Alice heard him go; heard the door shut, and shivered. It had been all right only on the Monday of that week. On that day Hugo had taken her down the crag-path, when they had passed Letty's timorous footsteps, and stood waiting for her in the road below. Now it was Friday, and how much had passed away from her! How greatly had life changed! Hugo was no longer her own property, and she herself had bid him go. There Alice sat in the changing light, for "the moon was up, and yet it was not night," and she watched the quietness of evening come down upon the outside world, which grew still, clear in every outline, and dense in the blackening shade. There will not be time to see him before he goes, she feels.

The soft air whispered among the shrubs. She listened to the strong-throated thrush, that gave forth sudden bursts of warbling notes, and dropped as suddenly into silence again; and up from the thickets of foliage and flowers came the scents that are never known to-day, but walk like spirits through the night air, and have a wonder and a sweetness of their own. She hardly knew how long she stayed in this state of speechless watching. She was roused by the sound of wheels, and then a carriage was driven to the door; and Hugo's voice was heard, "Good night—good night! I shall not be late."

He never said, as he would once have said, "Where is Alice?" No one spoke her name. She had passed out of his life, surely; and the loneliness of her state forced itself on her once more—so sadly that she sat down and again she wept. Then very quietly she went away by the door that led to the staircase, and got into the shelter of her own room and began to dress for dinner.

The maid-servant was there, and so, happily, Alice was prevented from indulging in the weakening luxury of self-pity. Her own story, such as she had made it for herself, had begun to come to her filled with sadness. It was almost impossible to think of it without tears. It was a grief not at all the more easy to bear because she had herself created it. There lay her life, like a beautiful blossom broken, or a treasure cast aside. What could she do?

It had once occurred to her that she would tell her mother the whole truth; but calm consideration assured her that this would only be adding woe to woe. It was a case in which no good could possibly come from a confession so humiliating. She must suffer and wait. If Hugo ever came to her again, oh! he should be doubly crowned! Then—only then—and to him—only to him—she could tell all, and she would tell it. For the time, all pride and displeasure had gone out of her heart, and so she clothed herself in humility, and went down to her father and mother, who thought her looking all that could be desired, and made great acts of self-sacrifice for her sake, giving up their long-cherished hope about Hugo, and vowing that she should neither be annoyed by his presence, nor troubled by recollections of what had passed, if they could prevent it.

And so Hugo dined at Trederrick, and looked with an amused sort of admiration at Letty. And Letty—always remembering how her uncle, Colonel Penwarne, had spoken to her that day upon the lawn at Coombe—was very glad to see him again, delighted to observe her mother's gracious ways to him, and glad, with a very deep-seated pleasure, to see her father's approval. She was obeying Colonel Penwarne—she was setting the example of liking Hugo.

Hugo thought her lovelier than ever.

She was dressed in a pale, violet-coloured, gleaming silk, and she had green violet-leaves among the masses of her dark-brown hair. Mr. Baynard was there, and thought that things were being "helped on" very satisfactorily.

Lady Judith did the amiable to Hugo in a way quite

unusual to her. He received it all as a matter of course, only saying in his heart, where the memories of former systems of repression lived in unfading freshness, that she was a terrible humbug.

"What can be the matter now?" was his inquiry of his own intelligence. "What can all this civility be about?—what has produced it? It can't have been the trout——"

Hugo never dwelt long on any interior inquiries. Wonderland had very little interest for him. To slay the giants, strangle the impossible creatures, and walk forth into common life, was the first instinct of his nature—a form of self-preservation greatly to be recommended. He forthwith left Lady Judith's untranslatable smiles for Letty's pleasant words. He sang songs with Sophy Cereseau, and talked musical talk with her in a dutiful way; he even listened to Lord Belton's rhapsodies about Alice, for he thought the youth in the right, and it was not a way of his to stop the utterance of any words of justice and truth, unless too utterly out of place. There was nothing out of place in praising the niece in the uncle's house. "And then we are a kind of cousins, you know," said his lordship, in unasked-for vindication of himself.

"And we are kind of cousins all round, I believe," said Sophy Cereseau saucily—"is it not so, Captain Penwarne?"

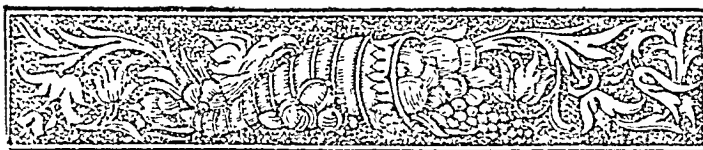
But Captain Penwarne was ready with his answer—"Alas! Miss Cereseau, that I should be nothing to you!"

"Oh! I forgot; but we are such a family party."

Hugo walked off to talk to Mr. Drake.

He felt that his welcome had something impressive in it. For a moment he felt awkward. But Peter Drake was really a man who never failed in being as agreeable as he intended to be. Hugo scarcely left him after his conversation began till it was time to leave the house. But before he went he had almost promised Sir Henry Towers, Lord Belton's friend and distant relative, one of the two tourists that day found at Newton, and a member of the Alpine Club, that he would join him in a continental tour towards the end of the summer. Such a prospect seemed to suit Hugo's circumstances very well.

"I need not go unless I like it," he meditated, as he went back to Coombe, "and it is a natural sort of thing to do—a good reason for absence. I am very glad I was asked to Frederick to-night."



CHAPTER XIX.

LOOKING FACTS IN THE FACE.

Then both agree in one,
Sorrow doth hate
To have a mate;
True griefe is still alone.—BROWNE.



THE next morning at breakfast Alice and he met, not having seen each other since Tuesday's dinner-party. He spoke of the very pleasant evening he had had, and said he was going to repent at leisure of all evil uttered or thought of, from his childhood upwards, in respect of Lady Judith,

Mrs. Penwarne said she was very glad; but when he spoke of her brother, he grew eloquent. "He ought to be seen among men. He is not himself with ladies. I never knew him properly till last night."

"Thank you, Hugo. My brother is really a very gifted man," said Mrs. Penwarne, quietly; and then she and her husband looked at each other. They both knew why Mr. Drake had been so marked in his attentions to Hugo, though that young man himself, in the absorbing business of the breakfast-table, never seemed to think of any possible motives in connection with himself.

"I am going to London, you know," was the next of Hugo's utterances.

"Yes," was said gravely enough by Colonel Penwarne.

"I am going to Exeter this afternoon. I shall hear the anthem in the cathedral to-morrow. I shall get to London Monday morning. May I dine at luncheon? And what commissions can I do? I feel equal to anything. I am going now to say 'good-bye' to Miss Teague. I may be away a month. All letters can be directed to the Club."

The only comfort Alice had had for the week was in the sort of hurried way in which Hugo, between the morsels of toast and trout, had uttered these sentences. The comfort was small; but hungry souls do not despise small comforts, and a very hungry soul was Alice Penwarne's.

She said nothing. Her father and mother were speaking; but she had no interest in their words. Were the days gone when Hugo would have said, as a matter of course, "Come, Alice, make haste, put on your hat and come too."

Great changes are always shown by small things. Because they are great, they affect all life, even to its minutest trifles. Once more, very sharply wounding it, there dropped into Alice's heart the knowledge that Hugo was lost.

In another minute he was going past the window, never shunning the walk where, beneath his footsteps, she had flung down his life and her own. He was singing, thoughtlessly, as she believed; and she hurried away in self-tormenting bitterness. "Perhaps, if he sees the kingfisher from the bridge, he may think of me."

"What on earth is the matter now?" With such an outspoken, abrupt inquiry did Captain Penwarne announce his entrance into Miss Teague's morning room.

There the beloved lady sat in serene beauty of dress and countenance, and before her stood Joe Graham, arrayed in a pure white linen garment, used both for cleanliness and coolness, with his hands behind him, saying after her the verb "*to have*," in French.

"Joe is to learn French. When he goes to Canada, he will find a French aunt and cousins who speak that language as well as English. I discovered the other day that his mother expended a great deal of strength unnecessarily in trying to teach him, so I undertook to teach him in less time, and without any trouble. He is very good," said Miss Teague, approvingly; "and though he had only had one lesson from me before he went to Rhuby Moor, he can now tell me the French for *fish*, *horse*, *carriage*, and quantities of other things."

As Miss Teague had spoken each word, Joe had shouted out the French with great distinctness. "And how did you learn them?" asked Hugo.

"My mother taught me last evening. I know one hundred and ten words," said Joe, in triumph. "I shall speak pretty decent when I know three hundred."

"That's new!" exclaimed Hugo. "When will this lesson be over?"

"It is over now." On which Joe, with a bow, departed.

"Come and gossip, Nanny Teague."

The lady smiled. "In my regular life this hour on a fine morning belongs to the sands."

"Delightful! Do you go by the orchard?" so they strolled away by the hedge-side, where the columbines grew, and the self-sown Canterbury bells were beginning to make the world more gay.

Hugo helped Miss Teague over the huge stones that had to be passed after getting over the stile in the lane which led from the orchard to the shingle. Then, in a minute or two, their feet were on the sands. The tide was out; the morning was still and warm; the soft murmurs of the distant waves were heard in the pleasant silence, and Miss Teague said—"Turn to the right. My morning seat is in the shelter of that great rock. I can look down the sands and see the whole stretch of coast from there."

So they went to the upstanding, dark rock that jutted out from the precipitous cliff, round whose solid base the waves had circled through unreckoned time, and made little caverns and benches and canopied seats.

"I have been vexed," said Hugo, as soon as they were seated in the warm shelter commanding the long reach of sand and coast.

It was so like himself in his boyhood to say this; his manner was so much the manner of the child who had come in penitence, grief, and perfect honesty, to her with the words "I have been naughty" on his lips, that she could not help smiling.

"What does that mean, Hugo?"

"I can't explain. Besides, of course, Alice has told you. I have been vexed. I have suffered a cruel awakening. And I can't talk about it."

"You are here to talk, surely!"

"Alice must have told you?"

"Yes; Alice told me."

"Well, then, that's enough."

"As you please."

"Pray don't be cross," said Hugo.

"I won't be cross; but I may be curious. If you are not going to talk, why are you here?"

"Simply to tell you. Have I not always told you everything?"

"No. You never told me you loved Alice."

Then in her heart she felt that if he had really loved Alice, he certainly would have told it. He was the sort of lover who would most surely require a gossip, and that gossip would have been herself.

"But was I wrong to be silent? Did not everybody know? Did not she know?" he asked. "Where would have been the manliness, the wisdom, even the propriety, circumstanced as I was, of filling up a girl's mind with thoughts of love, and her time with perpetual love-making? I respected her too much. She is not yet nineteen. I respected her too much, I say, and I could not repent of *that*."

"I never said a word of your being wrong, Hugo."

"What did you mean, then?"

"I mean that men have a great advantage over women in these affairs. A man, if he be honest, knows his own meaning from the beginning; a woman is ignorant. If she be diffident, she shrinks from over-rating the value of his attentions. She fears; she never realizes; it is always more of fear lest he should have no meaning, than hope that he may mean the most——"

"But when a man speaks she knows."

Miss Teague sighed, "I have no more to say than that which my general statement contains," she said.

"Alice is one of the best women in the world. I am sure she thoroughly likes and respects me. I am nevertheless now cruelly wide-awake. I can't say any more. I only have said this because I will not, if I can help it, have anything interfere with *our friendship*—which is only a poor word for what I feel for you; let me correct it—our love."

"Indeed, I love you, Hugo. And as to your love for me, thank you for it, my dear."

"And now I am going to keep out of sight for awhile?"

"Where are you going?"

"To London. I start to-night. I am going to say good-bye at Trederrick. Shall I help you over the big stones?"

"No. I stay here for an hour. Hugo, do you see the footsteps?"

"On the sand? Yes; I have been gazing at them all the time. What a number!"

"They are made by the people who work at the mines;

by those, too, who come to the village for tea, sugar, tobacco, and all the things we are licensed to sell. Do you know that I recognize the different footsteps, as I see them for days together, with intervals between, when the tide is high, and the miners go by the way across the down. Little Joe used to dance in among them before the last high tides at their morning hour. Ever since his mother got worse, he has been with her. His last footsteps were ten days ago. When she dies, he will go to Canada. I shall never see his steps among those of the crowd any more. I am got to be a moralizing old woman. Let nothing take your footsteps out of our—my—Alice's life."

"But she has walked herself out of mine."

Then he left her, after a word or two of pleasant good-bye. He left her by the wide village road that came straight down to the beach. He walked up, speaking words of greeting to the men, with smiles for the women, and a gay laugh for the children whom he came upon on his way. Then he turned to the right, going up the road to Trederrick, that years before had felt Miss Teague's hurrying feet as she went quickly down the slope, and made her way to Desirée d'Antoine.

Hugo reached the house by the terrace that lay level in the sunshine, and leaning against the parapet wall that formed the fence against the steep slope of flowering shrubs, he saw Lady Judith, with a parasol, to shield her head, which had only a lace cap upon it, from the heat, and holding a book in her hand.

She put the book on the wall while she held out her hand to Hugo. "I am glad to see you again," she said. "Will you go into the house?"

"No; I need not take you in. I only came to say I start to-night for town. I shall be away for a few weeks, that's all," he said, carelessly.

"We are going up after the Dynhams are gone," she said. "Mind you come to see us."

"I will come, certainly." Then Hugo looked at the book before him. "You read German, I see."

"Yes. I early learned it," she said, gravely.

"So did I. I was three years as a boy in a German college. Colonel Penwarne has a great respect for languages. But that's a bad book," he said, laying it down again.

She laughed, as she turned her head a little away from

his, and looked out straight before her to the far horizon, which was indistinct as it took the colour of the sky; and no eye could tell where this world ceased and the pale soft blue of Heaven began.

Hugo did not answer her directly. His attention was fixed on Lady Judith's face.

"Perhaps it is something like the scene before us. It requires good eyes to see the line 'twixt *this* and *that*," she said, moving her hand, and pointing from the ground to the sky, to explain her meaning.

"I don't know that—as to earth and heaven, I mean. I like this earth very well. The line as it is traced in that book is 'twixt Heaven and—you know."

Again she laughed, and again Hugo looked at her wonderingly. It was a strange sort of face—one of those which are very beautiful in profile, but not quite pleasant to look at face to face. Now, Hugo only saw the fine, clear-cut features, against the shadow of the brown parasol held between herself and the sun; and he observed that still, at fifty years of age, her skin was like satin, fair and soft, but very pale. There was no colour about her head, except from the thin lips closed over a hard mouth, and the reddish brown hair, which only showed a few white lines, and which was still abundant, and rippled with its own natural curl as it was parted back from the low forehead, and twisted up with the thick coils that were wound round at the back.

"She is horribly handsome," thought Hugo. "And how terrible great grey eyes may be when they have learnt to look so habitually angry with life."

"As to the book," said Lady Judith, bringing her amused eyes to bear on Hugo's face, "it is full of beauty—it is the history of a woman's ruined life."

There was something about her manner which made Hugo feel that he was dared to single combat; and as there was nothing of the coward in his composition, he accepted the challenge at once. "Which is scarcely a subject for the mere entertainment of a work of fiction; and which, if true, should never have been written."

"Not written? Why not?"

"A woman's shame is a thing which is sad, even to solemnity. I could stain my hands with blood to recover her; but——"

"Ah, that is how a man feels," interrupted Lady Judith.

A man! It sounds like a title of honour, sometimes. I

am glad you can feel like a man. Now I have a sympathy for ruined lives, and yet—I will so far yield to you as to say that I should be contented with some sort of ruin less than sin."

"I don't believe in your kind of ruined life," said Hugo.

Once more Lady Judith laughed, and she looked at him with amusement darting from her keen cold eyes. "It is the freshest thing that has come across my path for years, this talking to you. So you don't believe in disappointment, and ignore the possibility of mistake."

"I did not say that. I believe in both. I only mean that the things we suffer need never ruin our lives. Life may be changed. But altered lives are not ruined lives. Probably altered life is the real life, the life in which we can best work out such perfection as we have it in us to win."

"That is theology."

"And common sense."

"I never talk theology," she said.

"Nor do I ever," retorted Hugo.

"Well, then, sublimer ideas apart, all you mean to say is that what can't be cured must be endured. When you find yourself in any irrecoverable dilemma, I hope you may find comfort in such despair."

"I mean more than that, a great deal. I think when any dilemma, not of the nature of sin, is discovered with certainty to be irrecoverable, that the proper thing to do is to learn to like it."

"Good gracious!"

It was a very uncommon thing for Lady Judith to be surprised out of her usual cold propriety of manner and expression, but she was utterly surprised now. She looked round at Hugo with eyes that darted light, and for a moment she looked like one visited by some utterly new inspiration. Then the bright ray faded from off the hard face, and with a manner of cool contempt she said:

"That is, if you, as a round man found yourself in the square hole, you would fill up the corners with cakes and ale."

"To be imaginative after your example, I should I hope fill up the angles with strong resolutions, and there grow,"—his eyes were on the sweet-smelling, flower-covered precipice beneath the parapet wall where they were standing,—"*and there grow all sorts of things. I fancy that I should get a great deal of gratification out of it, and become a decidedly ornamental member of society.*"

"You won't be beaten," she said, giving a twirl to her parasol and walking towards the house.

"But I can surrender. I ask forgiveness for being so disputatious. I am here to say 'Good-bye,' so let me say it. And you are coming to town?"

"In three weeks. Won't you go in?"

"No, thank you; I see Mr. Drake yonder. I will go to him."

They shook hands, and Lady Judith walked thoughtfully back again to the parapet wall.

When Hugo met Mr. Drake they went on to the walled garden, Hugo having said he would go that way, and out by the door which opened on the drive, from which he could get to Coombe by the crag-path.

Up and down a long walk by a wall where the trees gave promise of abundance of fruit they walked talking, till Hugo said, "I must go now, or I shall be late for luncheon, a serious meal for me, as it is to stand for dinner."

Then they stood still by that door which Hugo was not going again to pass.

The remembrance of the letter which had been written to Colonel Penwarne came to both their minds at one and the same moment. Hugo thought—I will speak to him; Peter Drake thought with less decision—Shall I speak to him?

The younger man was the quicker both to decide and to act, and he began.

"Before I go, and as this seems a good opportunity, I will say—for I hate secrets—that I read the note to Colonel Penwarne in which you mention Miss Drake—in fact, offering her to me as my wife."

It was certainly said plainly enough. Mr. Drake even wondered if he really had said the thing that had now been put to him in words not to be misunderstood. He felt nervous just for one instant, and then he said, as if excusing himself, "I am a very bad life, Hugo."

"I don't think anything at all about that. I am not in the entail, though Colonel Penwarne is. I know his intentions as to me—what *were* his intentions. I have refused to profit by them, with all the strength I have in me. I expect to go to India again in little more than a year. The life of a man who, in these times, can't be secure against going any day again into action, is the worst of anybody's; and I am not going to take a wife to India. Of

course I am very much obliged to you. You must have had a good opinion of me."

"Yes, I have. You could easily exchange, if anything happened to make it worth your while to exchange into a regiment likely to stay in this country."

"Of course."

"If anything happened, you know."

"Of course," said Hugo again, feeling that he had really no more to say,

"Then good-bye," said Mr. Drake.

"Good-bye," said Hugo, feeling oddly, and as if he had been worsted.

Mr. Drake opened the door with a key he took from his pocket, and he locked Hugo out. There was nothing to be done but to scramble up the crag-path with all convenient speed, and he did so accordingly.

When Mr. Drake went back to the house, he found Lady Judith still on the terrace. She walked to meet him. She said, looking away to the far-off-sea-line:

"Peter, if that man liked to marry her, it would suit *me*."

"Thank you, my dear." He gave her his arm. They entered the house together.

Being *one* in this way was a remarkable fact in their lives.





CHAPTER XX.

EXPERIENCE.

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of love,
And feeds his sacred flame,—COLERIDGE.

WHEN the sun rose on Coombe on Monday morning, it rose on a world in which the absence of Hugo Penwarne was a recognised fact; and very deep-thinking people could no doubt give a reason for the additional fact that Alice's spirits seemed to rise, and her heart to grow lighter, when relieved of the one man whom she had ever loved. Here the fact alone is recorded. To give any reasons for this young lady's sensations might only unnecessarily retard our story.

Her thoughts were something of this sort—"I have not spoken, but there will arise something to write about. He is out of danger. Away from Trederrick, Letty can never do either him or me any mischief. If I write, it will be like old times."

The sun rose, and it was a brilliant day. Alice got some work, and a book also, and packed them in a basket.

"Mother, I am going to the Holly Seat. Do you think you would come too?" This was said in the afternoon.

"Very likely, dear; yes, certainly. Your father is going to Marsland."

The Holly Seat was a place of peaceful shade, built up beneath a grand group of the shining green foliage, where a natural platform was made by the granite on one side of the crag-path, not very far below the level of the lawn at Coombe.

Alice had not been seated very long in her solitude, and in the enjoyment of her book, when she heard a step below

advancing upon her. It could only be some one from Trederrick, and she hoped it might be Letty. She had something to make amends for towards Letty. In Hugo's absence, it was so easy to forgive her for the possession of so much which had excited her jealousy a little while ago. "Everything was my own fault," said Alice; and then the thought came with a smile—"And, anyhow, he is not talking to Letty now."

But the steps were not Letty's. It was Lord Belton, who came up with long strides, and stood before her with his hat off, and his bright curling hair in picturesque disorder. "It is so hot." Which he said very seriously, and quite with the air of a man who had said a new thing. Alice laughed, and looked in his face from her sheltered seat.

"Why do you laugh? You must be laughing at *me*. That is not civil, is it? Won't you repent? I can't, I suppose, ask you to apologize, eh? May I stay here and talk to you? I can sit here, on this crag, just opposite. Lend me your parasol. Laughing again! If you won't lend me your parasol, I must come and sit beside you. There!" And Lord Belton was sitting at the further corner of the bench.

"You ask so many questions all in a breath. Perhaps I laughed at that."

"And I may sit here?"

"There is plenty of room," said Alice. "But my mother is coming, and if you are not gone then you will have to move."

"I don't see that. But may I stay till she comes?"

"No," said Alice.

Lord Belton looked at her quite aghast, and not to laugh once more Alice found to be impossible.

"You are three years younger than I am, and yet because you have been half over the world you are so much more—more——"

"Rude," suggested Alice, wishing to make amends for her merriment.

"No, I don't mean that. I think *powerful* is the word. Had you any reason for saying 'No'?"

"Of course I had. 'No' is a safer answer always—almost always—than 'Yes!'"

"Because you may unsay 'No,' and you can never unsay 'Yes?'"

"Perhaps. Only, as I am 'powerful,' I think I should find strength for unsaying any word I might really wish unsaid."

But now Lord Belton laughed, and Alice felt the younger of the two, which sensation she found to be not altogether a pleasant one.

"May I see the book you are reading?" She gave the volume into his hands.

"Shall I read to you?"

"No," said Alice.

He stayed quite still, in perfect silence, looking at the open page. She looked again; he had not moved.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I am waiting for the word to be unsaid; you will do it directly."

"Please to go away, Lord Belton."

"That is unjust and uncousinly. If I were to go away it would be to submit to an injustice. You could not desire that?"

"Yes," said Alice.

"Then what shall I read? The word is unsaid, plainly."

They looked in each other's face, and laughed quite merrily.

"How silly we are! You can read just what you please."

Without saying any more, Lord Belton began to read that which seemed to be before his eyes for no other reason than that the book had opened into it. It was the story of how Genevieve was won. Of how

"She stood and listened to the lay,
Amid the lingering light."

He read it through whilst Alice listened, working at first, but, after a minute or two, with her hands lying idle, and her eyes fixed on the reader. He read it so well, so beautifully, with such accuracy of tone, with such fulness of meaning, and with such an utter absence of all effort, that it seemed like living through the scene more than like *listening* to the description of it.

"Who taught you to do that?" she asked; but her own voice had changed, with the mingled wonder and delight of following his.

"Taught!—taught!" he repeated. "It's Coleridge, you know. What can you mean?"

"How much you must like it!"

"I don't like that story. It's all very beautiful; but I don't like *her*!"

"It's too *something*, I feel," said Alice; "but I can't describe what I mean."

"It's well enough in a book, but I should not like it in real life. She was too quick about it."

"And that may be a fault?"

He read the lines in a mocking voice:

"She half-enclosed me in her arms,
She pressed me with a meek embrace."

Now, I think I should not have liked, had I been the knight, to have been pressed in any embrace, however meek; until I had asked for it a great many times."

"Oh!" said Alice, with her eyes on the ground.

"That's why I don't like her."

"She had better have said 'No.'"

"Certainly, to my taste."

"And what then?"

"I should have understood, and made her unsay it."

Alice was silent. Cousin, after a fashion, as the youth was, she thought the conversation rather odd, but it interested her greatly; and then they were not talking of themselves, they were only talking of Genevieve.

"No doubt it's sidgetty of me; but I should think a woman might be truthful and understanding, and yet find some better way than she did of—of saying 'Yes.'"

"I think so, too." But now Alice also thought that it was time to rise from her seat, and say she was going back to the house.

"My father and mother are there. They drove round by the road when I came up the crags."

"But you should have told me."

"Should I?—I did not know. I only knew that, seeing you here, I would rather not."

They walked up the steep, with only a word or two of caution from Lord Belton.

"I know my way; I do it every day nearly," said Alice, as they stood almost breathless on the grass before the house: "and there is Lady Dynham looking at us."

They entered the room by the open window, and Alice found Lady Dynham all smiles, and Lord Dynham all grandeur and politeness.

When they were gone Alice sat outside the window and began to think. Something new had come into her life.

She had a great interest in a man who was nothing to her, and whom a few days before she had been ready to laugh at, because he was not much beyond boyhood.

She was never going to laugh at him again. She liked him very much. She could not help thinking of how that man would love, and of the fashion in which he would conduct his love-making. He would ask more than once. He would honour what he desired to have by painstaking pursuit. He would change *No* into *Yes*.

She liked to ponder upon it, and she sat there some time, not choosing to deprive herself of the indulgence. It was, she settled at last, a much better thing to stand a siege and finally surrender, than to have had a man's life from the beginning, so part of it that it became necessary to lose him to find out whether he was loved or not. That was exactly the state of things with regard to Hugo. Life, she thought, had been very hard; circumstances terribly cruel; she had not known her own heart till Hugo had gone out of her reach. Why had he taken her answer? Why had he not told her on the bridge that she did not know herself? Why had he not turned *No* into *Yes*?

She wiped the tears of vexation from her eyes; then blamed herself, and strung up her nerves to bear the loss bravely. She would take the life that lay before her—the life without Hugo—and accept its good gifts thankfully. She wondered what they might be—where they were? One lesson she had just, but quite unconsciously, learnt—that there were many men in the world besides Hugo.





CHAPTER XXI.

HEARTS.

The bloom of youth, the majesty of years,
The softened aspect, innocent and kind,
The sigh of sorrow and the streaming tears,
Resistless all, their various pow'r combined.—GRAY.



MRS. PENWARNE was a thoughtful mother. But as she had confided her thoughts through all life to "Nanny Teague," it was not likely that she should let this important era in Alice's life pass by without some considerable amount of gossip in relation to it. That very afternoon, having allowed Alice to return to Frederrick with the Dynhams, and having promised to fetch her at five o'clock, she went away by the wood and the bridge—never thinking of kingfishers—to Miss Teague's cottage. It was almost a holy thing when these two met, and met alone. Their hearts were so true, each to the other. Mrs. Penwarne was "Jane" once more, the beloved being of the lonely woman's life, who was not lonely, nevertheless! no true-hearted woman ever is.

There are a few people in the world who are certainly born for a single life, and to them it is blessedness. Of course every woman has a right to be loved; and to inspire affection is the indisputable woman's mission. Of course, as a general rule, it is conceded that to marry is good—in fact, to deny that, in a general rule, it is the state to which women are born, is to walk through life with one's eyes shut, and one's fingers in our ears; all manner of dangers, difficulties, inconvenient stumblings, and ridiculous recoveries being the consequence. Still, there are those who have had their chances, and have so been saved from all sense of neglect, and yet who have never married, and have had their lives so full that, to have bestowed themselves on

one must have looked like an injustice to many ; a woman's rights, notwithstanding : and of such was Marian Teague.

Let the fact console the disconsolate of the other sex under disappointment ; for life, if sometimes a cruel thing to individuals, is a good thing in the long run even to them ; the cruelty being only for the moment, and the law that prefers the general good being rooted in wisdom.

What would people—our people in this history—have done if Marian Teague had belonged to the aspiring youth who first asked her?—to the excellent physician who could not bear to have her go to India?—to either of the admiring officers who felt that a good destiny had sent them a wife across the sea from the home-land which they were not to see again for many long years? In truth, imagination can give no guess as to what the dear good Penwarne would have done without Miss Teague ; and Miss Teague always declared that life would have been barren, and the world a desolation, but for them. Then, with all Miss Teague's excellence and fascination, it is a fact that not any of her lovers had broken their hearts or done anything desperate or ridiculous. They had found willing souls elsewhere ; and some had consulted her in good time on their suitability. They had continued to be her friends ; she had been the godmother to their children, and the beloved of their wives. In fact, Miss Teague respected love with a profound respect ; but she was not sentimental. She had, however, loved the first aspiring youth well ; but they could not marry. Each had had to earn the daily bread which is necessary to life. So they parted, and did it. The physician had perhaps been more nearly winning the prize than he ever knew. Had Jane not married Major Penwarne, Miss Teague would, probably, have married Doctor Morington. She would have married, and as the doctor was not rich, she would have taken three young ladies as pupils, of whom Jane would have been, if possible, one. But life, though cruel to the lovers, had ordered Miss Teague's past, present, and future in a manner with which she saw no cause to quarrel. She had been twice to India, and twice back ; she had been as much mistress of Coombe in the intervals of Hugo's vacations and Alice's holidays as she had before been mistress of Trederick ; and during her residence in England she had nursed old Lady Dynham through more than one severe illness, taken her to the seaside, and once even brought her down to Coombe for a winter

of shelter and warmth, and so, as it was believed, on the best authority, prolonged her life.

Almost everybody in the village remembered the day when, wrapped in furs, and leaning on Marian Teague's arm, the old lady had visited her daughter's grave, and stood there with a softened heart, weeping over the *one* child she had borne, the *one* dear thing she had had to lose. It was a wonderful thing to have got the old lady out of London; but London had been pronounced to be full of low fever that year, and there was ugly talk of drains and infected water-springs. Miss Teague had a conversation with the medical friend of the lonely, aged woman, and then she proposed Coombe—Coombe and Alice's Christmas holidays. Hugo was gone with his tutor and three other pupils to Nice; and Miss Teague had conquered. The letters written that year from Coombe had been kept by Mrs. Penwarne. They were letters in the trembling hand of age, but, notwithstanding the trembling, very neatly-written epistles; and there were postscripts from Alice, on ruled lines, penned with a precision that evidently emulated the neatness of her great-grandmamma's.

Now, on this afternoon, in her child's and her husband's absence, as Mrs. Penwarne was walking towards the village and Miss Teague's, all these things came home to her with a great gratitude on their memories; so that, when she walked up to her friend standing in her brightly-decked sitting-room, she said, between her kisses—"Marian Teague, what would the world have been without you?"

"Too full of hard work, my dear. Jane, I really doubt if you could have done it, and kept your youth and good looks. Eight-and-thirty!—I can hardly believe it. You don't know how much you owe me!"

And truly Mrs. Penwarne looked very lovely. Hers was a beauty that had required full womanhood for its perfecting. She had not done more than reach her best at twenty-five, and the years that had passed since that date had not begun to fade her.

"I am sure I brought you up excellently, Jane. I am very proud of myself."

"I have been thinking everything over—everything."

"Well?"

"And so I am come to you."

"Of course. What is it?"

"I am not happy about Hugo and Alice."

"My dear Jane, you must let it alone."

"That is just what Arthur is doing; and yet he is really disappointed. He wanted Hugo to have Coombe, and, of course, Alice to have it too."

"It's no use to bury people before they are dead. Earth to earth in that sense is quite wrong. Not to give a woman her way in her marriage is consigning her to a living death; and to do that for the sake of an estate——"

"But Hugo was so fond of her—so wished it——"

"Y-e-e-s," murmured Miss Teague.

"Why, you don't believe it?"

"He believed it."

"And Alice?"

"Alice is not, perhaps, in love with Hugo."

"Oh! Nanny Teague, if I thought so!"

"Well, what then?"

"It would settle one's mind. If I thought I *knew* anything of Alice's mind. I am breaking my heart, because she may be unhappy, and yet I know nothing about it."

"No, she is *not* unhappy—she is not unhappy in the way you think. She is put out. She finds life quite changed, and she is pilloried as the culprit who is answerable for it. She does not like the changed life; but Hugo made the change, not Alice. If Alice was so necessary to Hugo, why did he not work to secure her? He mismanaged the whole thing, and surely, if he had been properly in love, he would *not* have mismanaged it."

"Then you don't believe that either of them loved?"

"Neither of them loved as Hugo *believed* they loved. I take Alice's part. I believe her woman's instinct saved her."

"Saved!"

"Yes—saved her from doing the most eligible thing in the world for—for Hugo."

"Poor Hugo!"

"Yes, poor Hugo. But he will find out a new love somewhere, and then he will not speak too soon, nor too positively. He will fear, and watch, and hope, and pray again and again—he will work, and he will win. Arthur Penwarne would have found excuses for you, if you had said *no* at eighteen to an unexpected offer, and blamed himself, and come to you again—oh! yes, and again too; if he had seen cause again to blame himself. You see, I know all about it. The truth that strikes me is that Hugo has never even suspected that

he might be to blame. He says that Alice is the best girl in the world, but that the love he asked for wasn't there. Why wasn't it there? And if he wished to put it there, why did he not begin to the work directly? Jane, you have nothing to do but to let things alone, and make the house thoroughly cheerful without Hugo. Do not allow his absence to be felt. Invent some way of forgetting all about this. Hugo is one of the best men in the world; but if a less perfect man would suit Alice, then that is the man for her to have."

"Oh! what a hard doctrine!"

"No, my dear, it is soft. It's all 'lilies and roses, and Cupid's best posies;' and if Colonel Penwarne looks grave, and as if one of his commands had been disobeyed beneath his eye, and in his own citadel, please to send him to me."

And it happened that Colonel Penwarne took tea with Miss Teague that very evening, and stayed late. On coming home he took Alice out to see the moonlight on the sea from the high ground at the back of Coombe.

It is quite late, but they do not mind, and they walk up through the pines.

"And when that calm spectatress from on high
Looks down—the bright and solitary moon,
Who never gazes but to beautify,"

then Colonel Penwarne seems to think he has a good moment for talking of his long-cherished hopes, and of what may have become of them.

The father and daughter up there in the silence talked long and freely. Colonel Penwarne had perhaps never before on one occasion spoken for so long a time together to Alice, and certainly never so freely, nor on this topic that he had now chosen. Alice listened well, growing better and stronger, happier and more *herself*, every moment. Then, when he had said all, she answered him.

An hour before she could not have spoken as she now found herself speaking. It was as if her father's words had placed her where she could see clearly, and decide with wisdom. She had had knowledge before, but knowledge had only made her sad, almost angry, and certainly at moments very fretful with herself, and with her life. But as Colonel Penwarne spoke she grew in good; she was led off the shifting ground of *if* and *why*; all questioning ceased, and there came a clear consciousness of personal responsi-

bility and power—power to be accounted for, to use with wisdom; the new treasure that belonged to the land of womanhood, to which her father seemed to be guiding her with a strong yet gentle hand. She felt strong in truth at that moment, and she spoke as she felt.

Then they turned their steps homeward, speaking softly still as they walked down the height. When they were on the lawn Colonel Penwarne drew her hand within his arm, and so they entered the house.

"If you change your mind—things may occur to make a change pleasant—you can tell me. For ourselves, as you know, we did not intend to go to town this year. We did not think of your being presented till next spring. I shall have to go once or twice, but only for a week at a time. But as your uncle will be going, and the Dynhams, if you thought you should enjoy it, we would go for a month. Tell me if you feel at any moment that this would be best. Hugo would keep his own lodgings, and we should be in an hotel. Of course we should see plenty of him. Three weeks, which must elapse before they leave Trederrick, may contain events to alter our plans, you know."

They were standing in the hall, and still the daughter's hand rested on the father's arm. "Very well, I will certainly tell you. Thank you, father."

They joined Mrs. Penwarne. "I almost envied you. What a night it is!"

"Yes. But it was sultry riding home from Marsland. By-the-bye, Carteray is sent for in a hurry to town. Cureton, the counsel in that tremendous will case, is taken ill, and Carteray was sent for in a hurry."

"It will be a great thing for him."

"Yes; he is highly thought of. Nothing shows it more than this. He has the world before him."

"When does he go?"

"He intended going up through the night. Old Sir Harry was quite in an excitement about it. Carteray is one of the rising great men of the day."

Alice stood between her father and mother, listening to their words, and she recognized distinctly that she was changed—that she had grown that night by her father's help from girlhood into womanhood. She had been shown her rights, and her duties, her power, and her responsibilities. She knew her place in the world, and had obtained a very clear insight into the things that belonged to it. There

as they waited, she was aware of a new consciousness; she stood between them on the same level. Experience had come. The stream that divides girlhood, with its trembling, uncertain vision, from womanhood, with its steady criticizing sight, had been crossed; and she was sure that she had not, with a woman's full knowledge, known the value either of what Hugo had said, or herself had answered. Up to this moment by her father's side, she had been like a child at play. The thought had now come to her that, Hugo's love being worth having, it was worth winning too. She might begin the world again—the woman's world, and deserve it. Patience was coming to help her, and she knew that she could wait.

And what had Miss Teague been doing? She had been scolding about Hugo—scolding like an old woman, intending some of it to drift back to him—scolding till Colonel Penwarne laughed. But in the midst of his amusement he made up his mind to speak to his daughter, and to be himself her good knight in this emergency. She should not feel alone. That, at least, he could prevent. He could show her the woman's true position, and keep her from all sense of desertion. Then he tried to vindicate Hugo to quarrelsome Nanny Teague.

"Why did he go away?" she had asked. "Go away, too, giving everything up. Just as if a woman's love was like a cherry, ripened day after day by the sun upon a wall. Hugo had been too successful. A great number of events have been crowded into his life, and every time he has been a gainer. But a woman's love has to be worked for. Yes, and suffered for; it is no mere worldly gift. 'A good wife is from the Lord!' You know the truth by experience. And did I not see you work? Ah! yes, and suffer. Oh! you may smile! How often did you wish yourself a dozen years younger, and other impossible things? As if I did not know! Hugo would, of course, make a good husband. But as for being a good lover—bah!"

"He has been very faithful," pleaded Hugo's stepfather.

"Of course. What else could he have been? He was not brought up to fall in love with things made up of white tulle and pink ribbon. I should as soon have thought of his falling in love with one's dressing-table. But I am not quite sure that he has not been, of course unintentionally, a little presumptuous. I doubt much whether he thoroughly knows the value of what he asks for. Disappointed? Yes,

I suppose so. And very uncomfortable. It is the first disappointment of any kind he has ever had. But it is not good for anybody to be always a winner, so I am glad he is vexed. Then, as to Alice, talk to her. Talk to her as a father should. Talk, Colonel Penwarne. A daughter's heart is a sacred trust. Talk—nothing separates like silence."

"I pray that God may bless you." Then the father had walked home, greatly enlightened and instructed by Miss Teague.





CHAPTER XXII.

CUT DOWN.

Lo! beauty withers in your void embrace,
And with the glitt'ring of an idiot's toy
Did fancy mock your vows.—ARENSIDE.

ANOTHER day, another world, another life—something better, and honester, and happier than anything Alice had ever known before.

It was better, because the woman's kingdom had opened before her, and it was rich in promise and in fact: honester, because she had summoned up all her powers, looked facts well in the face, known them, and confessed her knowledge: and happier, because she felt she had found the truth, and so attained success.

Alice stood in the bright morning, feeling as if some strange truth, with a sad sense of freedom, had come down upon her life.

There had been a shower of rain in the night; the air was fresh, and fragrant of green leaves. After breakfast she walked to the village, passing over the bridge, and even stopping to see the kingfisher's darting flight. Of course Alice had things to say to Miss Teague. She found that dear lady standing by the door, enjoying the delicious air.

"Let us go to the Columbines. The tide is high, and so my morning walk to the sands has ceased. I have had seats put by the sloping hedge-side, under the great apple tree, that was so red with flowers the other day. The grass is mown all round, and there are footstools, and the seat is large, and quite luxurious. Let us go."

Then they heard the latch of the gate, and they turned round to see who was come. It was Letty. Her face was pale; she looked beautiful, but stiller than ever.

"Oh! have you heard that Mr. Carteray is gone to

London?" said Alice. "He was sent for suddenly. He is to be on the will case that everybody is talking of. People say it is such a good thing for him. My father was at Marsland yesterday, and saw him. He says it was quite a strange confusion of pride and pleasure with Mrs. Carteray, and old Sir Harry did not know whether to laugh or cry."

"Papa heard from Mr. Carteray this morning," said Letty, with white lips. "Did he really go to town through the night? He did not say that."

"Letty, you look pale. You have been standing in the sun," said Miss Teague. "There is nothing more thoroughly unwholesome. I learnt a great deal about the sun in India; enough to make me wonder that in these warm English nooks we don't all die or lose our senses with sun-stroke."

"It is quite hot to-day. But the morning was cool, and the rain in the night delicious."

Letty seemed glad to talk of the weather. But they all went to the Columbines, and sat there for a while in the shade. Still Letty seemed to have something to say—something in her mind that must be said somehow. "I came here to speak to you," said Letty.

"To me—speak on, my dear. Alice, go home. I see plenty of you, and not half enough of Letty."

"But I should like Alice to hear. Please sit still. Are you going to town, Alice?"

"No; certainly no. I am sure we are not intending to go. I can't imagine anything that could take us."

"My father and mother go the end of the month. I was in London in the winter. I want to stay here. Of course they will not leave me alone at Trederrick."

"And you are coming to Coombe. Oh, Letty, how delightful! You will come; you want to come; tell me quickly. How pleased I am!"

"I have not been asked yet," said Letty, demurely.

They laughed. "You shall be asked before luncheon-time."

"It would be the greatest possible relief to me," said Letty, gravely. "In London my father is quite independent of me. And my mother always leads her own life. I can be easily parted with, and I should be so glad to be at Coombe."

"Believe it settled," said Miss Teague. "Everybody *ought* to like it. Until we know to the contrary, let us suppose that everybody will do as they should."

They talked for a few minutes, and then Letty said she must go.

The truth was this. That morning Mr. Drake had said at breakfast, when they were all assembled—"Here is luck in Cecil's way!" And he had thrown a note across the table to Lady Judith. She had read it aloud.

"I am going to town immediately, on the Gresham case," she read. "Cureton is ill, and I am to take his work. It is very quick work for me, but I know a good deal, having been in the midst of it all, and, perhaps, for many reasons, am the best they could have in the emergency. Lady Judith will forgive me if I am not at her service in London, as I should wish to be. It will be hard work. As soon as I am free, I meditate a run to Alpine air."

Lady Judith tossed the note, when she had finished it, back to her husband, and he gave it to Letty. The girl read every word; considered every word; wondered over it all, and gave it back—"Thank you, papa." And it seemed to her as if the life was going out of her. What could it mean?

Cecil Carteray was her lover; her promised husband, who had vowed never to be parted from her; who, but a few days before, had had her promises from her own lips, and asked to hear that she loved him again and again. He had only been withheld from asking her of her father at once because of the difficult life she led, and because of her own wish that he would delay his pleading till Lord and Lady Dynham were gone. His voice seemed still to sound in her ears. It was such a little time ago. What did he mean; what *could* he mean? What did he intend her to know? That he was going without trying to see her—without asking her of her father—that he should not see them at all, perhaps, in town; and that he was going abroad the first moment he was at liberty! It was all wonder and desolation. She found her life all suddenly broken to atoms, and she could not put it straight. Could she do anything? No. She thought it all through, but the more she knew the more she felt the utter powerlessness of her state. Once she thought she would write to him. But she gave up the idea in a moment. It was impossible. After all that had passed. It was so much to her!

She heard her mother's voice, and in the midst of her misery she looked at her. Lady Judith was looking very triumphant. Her confident glances were going round

the table, and she wore an air of the most complete satisfaction.

Then Letty looked at her father; but his face was still. She could learn nothing from it; and a dreadful thought came into her mind—it was this, that Cecil had spoken to her mother, and that she had refused her consent, and parted them.

It was part of the penalty that belonged to Letty's life that she could think this, and could believe this of her mother. She was just as sure in her heart that her father did not know. When once the accusing thought entered her soul, she could not either slay or silence it. Her mother had been asked; her mother had parted them. Her mother had said *no* to Cecil, and he had obeyed her. Letty's heart seemed to wither under the feeling of certainty that possessed her. And then her mother sat in quiet, splendid triumph, and her father, in his happy ignorance, had shown her that terrible note.

The life that Letty had led, and to which she had been born, had prepared her heart to accept this thought as to her mother. Long years—young as she was, we may call her years long in experience of how her mother could annihilate another's life—had prepared her heart to receive this great fear. But how could she bear the burthen and live? She sat there, feeling that she did not know.

She wandered away out among the shrubs on which the library looked—the shrubs planted by that loved woman of whom her father would talk when they held their secret communings, but whose name had only passed her mother's lips in careless scorn or in critical asperity.

What a life Lady Jane's had been in Lady Judith's eyes! Buried alive, she called it; married to a country squire for love in their youth's prime, who was not rich then, only moderately well off, and whose riches, when they came, burthened with another's name, had only found her too delicate to return to life—what Lady Judith called life—but who still had lived for years, planting a garden, reading a book, watching children play, giving them back to heaven, and gazing from her dying bed on the great sea, teaching its lesson of obedience, coming and going, for ever, till "there shall be no more sea;" and it passes away when its hour comes.

Lady Judith had felt scorn for such a life; and her lip had curled as she read on the monumental stone of the incon-

solable grief. Once, Letty had heard her say, "He died too soon, and too suddenly to break his word." And she knew that the thought was very cruel, and the words untrue. For again and again she had heard of the old life from her father, and she knew from him how her Aunt Jane had superintended the cutting away of the high-growing shrubs, which had never been cut before, to prepare the place for Lady Judith.

So she thought, and there she wandered—wondering over her fate, and wishing that the short, happy past could die, as though it had never been, and that she could bury its memory. What could she do?

Think as she would, the question would come back. What could she do? There was literally no answer to it. What was there to do? Very soon the question took that form, as the one that was more practical; and she sat down to think, and to answer it, if any answer could be found. What was there to do?

She had already determined that she could not write to Cecil Carteray. All her womanhood rose up against that thought. Come what would, she could never do that. What else then was there to do?

She could speak to her mother—could she? No. It would be so worse than useless to do that. If Cecil had left her thus suddenly and entirely on her mother's bidding, he was gone past recall. She was very sure that her mother had done this arbitrary thing. It was one of the most natural ideas possible that she should do it. And if she had done it, no argument, no terms, no suffering would ever move her. And, even then, in the newness of her wondering grief, Letty felt that to believe Cecil a coward, and untrue, was a thing to be preferred to the actual knowledge of her mother's cruelty.

Cecil would go out of her visible life. But nothing could put her out of her own life; and in that life, as long as God kept them in existence, she and her mother must walk in each other's sight. She could not contend with Lady Judith. It would be easier to suffer silently, than to cry aloud, and declare her grief, and clank the chains she could not break, bringing a discord into the house, whose echoes would never sleep.

And then, just for a moment, she thought whether she could tell her father—a smile came to her lips. Her face grew lovelier with a strong, sweet resolve, that, as she had

been, so far, the solace of his life, she would never be his grief. Come what would, *never*. If Cecil had behaved well, and claimed her, she would have married him. Her father would have been glad to have seen her married. He had said so. She would have married Cecil in spite of her mother, and in any trouble her father would have been on her side; but she could not take her broken-hearted grief into his burdened life; a life destitute of all sweetness, except what came to him through her.

It comforted her to think that life was not altogether emptied of all good; something she could still do. She could suffer; suffer *silently*, and keep a great sorrow out of her father's heart; suffer *well*, so that he should never suspect how much her love was doing for him.

Letty never thought of getting Cecil back. He was like a soldier who had fled in the day of battle. He was a coward. He had vowed to be faithful. He had run away and left her. He was a traitor—no such manhood as she had loved had ever existed in him. The Cecil Carteray whom she had loved had never been.

And yet she knew that she could not see him and keep the life in her heart. She felt as if she must die if he ever spoke to her again. She never could go to London. She certainly could not go.

Then she thought of Coombe, and, though she heard Sophy Cerescau calling, she ran off into the shelter of the evergreens, forced a way through them, and got to the village road, and then to Miss Teague's, as has been seen.

The afternoon of this day saw Mrs. Penwarne at Trederrick. Lady Judith and Lady Dynham were at a work-table in the great oriel window at the end of the library.

Once Mrs. Penwarne, as a girl in a riding-habit, had come down that long room to welcome her brother after his marriage, in all the loveliness of girlhood—a loveliness that had even surprised him. Now she walked down its length beautiful in her womanhood; the twenty years of life that had passed over her had brought to her the knowledge of all good things; such troubles as she had gone through had given her courage, and the success she had shared had blessed her with a happy confidence.

She walked down the room, and Lady Judith, putting her work on a little table before her, met her half way; Lady Dynham rose and held out her hand. It was a thoroughly friendly greeting, but Mrs. Penwarne did not wish to say

what she had to say before any one; she really knew so little of her sister-in-law, that she could not venture on a single word about Letty in a third person's presence. As a good beginning she sat down and tried to be pleasant. Both ladies were really glad to see her, and for reasons of their own.

They had been sitting for an hour at work, but very busy with their thoughts all the time.

"I wonder what fortune Alice Penwarne will have?" Lady Dynham had just said, when Mrs. Penwarne was announced.

Since the dinner-party she had begun to think of her as a wife for Lord Belton. Then came, "Oh! how do you do?" and those thoughts were cut short.

By-and-by they were out on the terrace; it was a favourite place for sitting in the open air, as soon as the sun was off it. Mrs. Penwarne then found a moment to ask for Letty.

"I should enjoy having her at Coombe. She and Alice are getting cousinly; perhaps she would prefer joining you in town, after awhile. Will you think of it?"

"I should like to leave her with you very much, I am sure."

"Then it is settled," said Mrs. Penwarne.

"Oh! dear, no! Her father insists on a special property in Letty."

"But you will speak to Peter?"

"Yes." The word had a sound of peculiarly thoughtful deliberation in it.

"It will all come right," thought Mrs. Penwarne, as she walked away.





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GOSSIP OF LAST WORDS.

Long may the parent queen of flowers
Her fragrance here display;
Long may she paint my mantling bowers
And make my portals gay.

Where the green hill so gradual slants
Or flowery glade extends,
Long may these fair, these fav'rite haunts
Prove social to my friends.—CUNNINGHAM.



WHEN Mrs. Penwarne was gone, Lady Dynham went back to her thoughts about Alice and her fortune. "The Penwarne's are rich," she said. "I suppose the girl will be well dowered."

There never were two women more utterly different than Lady Judith and Lady Dynham, but they had more plain-spoken talk together than they ever had with any other persons. They knew so much of each other's lives, that all explanations and descriptions were cut out of their conversation as unnecessary. No needless expenditure of words and breath ever occurred when these two women talked; so Lady Judith answered plainly, "She *must* have fifteen thousand pounds. Her mother has had that."

"Not enough quite," returned Lady Dynham, threading her needle. "I was thinking of Belton. He is so taken with her."

"If he is, and if you don't like it, send him away. Alice is a very captivating young lady. But I should think her as likely to have thirty as fifteen thousand; and she is not going to marry Hugo, which you know was the only danger."

"I had not thought of that. But she is not?"

"No. Certainly. I suppose I know that."

"Coombe is a pleasant house, and they must be nice neighbours. Jane is nearly as handsome as ever. And how odd to see Miss Teague among them still!"

"She has been faithful."

"And so useful. What should we have done—ourselves, I mean—if she had not taken poor old Lady Dynham off our hands?" She meant Lady Jane Drake's mother. "She would have been left to hirelings, which is a terrible thought always."

"Mr. Drake was in Paris when his grandmother was ill; and he spent that winter at Nice. I was not well. Of course that poor old Lady Dynham was nothing to you. You had had to do your duty by Lord Dynham's mother."

"Oh, dreadful! Yes. He was a good son. And then there was his father too—such a very troublesome life we had at first; but that old Lady Dynham was a good step-mother. She really took a great deal of annoyance away from us," and Lady Dynham again paused to thread her needle.

"I wonder," said Lady Judith, "what is to become of Sophy Cereseau."

"Marry, I hope. She is very useful to me; but she must marry. I took her intending her to marry. I could not help taking her, my sister made so very bad a match after Mr. Cereseau's death. And then the property which would have come to him went to a male heir, and Sophy suffered for being a daughter. She has nothing till her mother dies, and then only what may bring in a hundred a year. She very nearly married Mr. Luxton last year. I thought it quite a settled thing; but he became heir to that fine Yorkshire property, by the death of those cousins—Sir James's two boys; and the other brother's son—the orphan. You remember. After that Mr. Luxton thought he would marry Liza, Lady Mary Cleverleigh's daughter."

"Is he engaged to her?"

"Oh yes; but secretly, at present. Their estates join; she will have a splendid fortune, and it was all made up the other day, before she came of age."

"Dear me! did Sophy feel it? She is a nice girl, very quiet."

"Ah, *that* quieted her."

"But it is always a disadvantage to a girl to be any-

where out of her mother's house. It makes her a sort of dependent."

"Which is the truth. But she is useful to me, and pleasant to both of us; and she likes luxury. As to living with my sister, how could she? Laura's husband is a city man, with girls by a former marriage; and three little boy Vellacoombs, by my sister. They live well, uncommonly well, and she declares she likes her life. I go to see her, and I find her immersed in household affairs, rusty and dusty in a back parlour full of cupboards, and as many books and bills, and red-taped parcels of paper on the table, as if she had been a lawyer's clerk."

Lady Judith laughed. "What is it all about?" she asked.

"House affairs—town house—country house; the servants' and stable accounts; the accounts for the children; correspondence as to charities for her husband; as to Dorcas societies and mothers' meetings for herself. I wonder how she can do it."

"And does she like it?"

"She says it is all charming. There is no trouble in buying and paying, and being bountiful and being begged of, if you have only the money, she says. It is all money—money—money. 'Take twenty pounds to Sophy. I like my life and my husband; and I love his children as I love my own. If you could know how I *wanted*, actually *wanted*, when poor Mr. Cerescau was alive. It cured me of gentility.' That is almost word for word what she says."

"And were they so poor?"

"They had a very small income. But he would have succeeded to a good property had he lived."

"I remember an old German saying, which advises people never to wait on other people's dying, 'You will have something to bite when your teeth are all gone,' it says. I think Mr. Cerescau's death must have been a good thing, and that Mrs. Vellacomb may not be far wrong. But I am sorry about Sophy and her lost lover. I had never heard of it."

"And pray do not mention it. Nothing hurts a girl so much as that kind of story. I am not aware whether or not the Cleverleighs know. They told me about Liza, for we have been friends all our lives, and I never said a word; but James Luxton behaved very ill. He knows the Vellacoombs, and he used to go there during Sophy's visits to them. She spends some time every year with her mother; and Lord Dynham was very civil to him. Then the two cousins were

killed, poor youths, and the other boy died ; and he drew off. Just that—he said nothing—just drew off. Then, when Sir James lost his son, you know, there was the title also in the future. In fact, all the Iuxton property unexpectedly centred in Sophy's lover, and he drew off."

"I would marry Sophy this season if I could," said Lady Judith.

"Yes, yes ; well, perhaps we may. But what is to become of Letty ? She is very handsome."

"I think so. But you know all about this entail ?"

"Of course. But Mr. Drake is rich."

"Well, rich enough, perhaps. But Letty's education has been peculiar. Her father's doing. Perhaps she may spend her life in discovering if there be any truth in the old couplet that declares—

' When house and lands are gone and spent,
Then learning is most excellent ; ' "

and Lady Judith laughed.

Lady Dynham might tell as much as she pleased ; but Lady Judith did not follow that example. She had heard a great deal, and told nothing, which notwithstanding all their plain-speaking, was not unfrequently found to be the case after one of these family talks. Still, Lady Dynham had got at some facts which were very seriously interesting to her ; she had learnt that Alice was free, and that there was not anything to dread from Hugo. She had had many fears and tremblings over that possibility, and she felt quite sure that if Alice liked Hugo, she was not one to be attracted from any honest liking by anything Lord Belton could offer her. She had told Sophy Cereseau's love-story, and for that she was half sorry. She had nearly, or quite, she could not remember which, promised to keep it a secret, and a secret it had been till that morning. But "confidence begets confidence." And "we are going away in a few days," said Lady Dynham, reconciling her conscience to the breaking of her word.

While she was thus meditating, Lady Judith began again about the Cleverleighs.

"They lived once at her place—Lerrens, near Marsland. It belongs to them now. When Mr. Cleverleigh became his father's heir, they went into Yorkshire. How far are they from that place of yours ?"

"About thirty miles off. Of course you know them. Liza was to have been presented this spring; but her mother is an invalid. I offered, but they seemed inclined to postpone it till her marriage. That was how I got to know of the engagement. It is not known to anybody—not even to Sir James, who is a charming man, I know. But his nephew behaved so ill; and I feel sure that he has never said a word to the Cleverleighs about Sophy. Of course if he had, they could never have told me of Liza." So Sophy's secret got told again.

"Mr. Luxton's uncle, Sir James, is a *very* delightful man," said Lady Judith. "It gives me a new interest in Sophy to hear of her trouble with that nephew. I knew Sir James as a girl. He has been here. He was here in the worst trouble that ever befell me."

"Ah, he has lost his own sons, now," sighed Lady Dynham; "But he is very civil to that nephew, and talks of him as his heir. People fancied that Sir Harry Goodman had secured Liza for that handsome son of his, Freddy; as everybody calls him. It's a terrible loss to spare a son to India. He went quite as a boy. They told me how kind the Pen-warnes had been to him there."

"I like Sophy," said Lady Judith, returning to the part of the story that interested her. "She has been a pleasant, obliging guest, and she has been contented here."

"It was quite a blessing to her to come. She wanted to go where nobody knew."

"Of course nobody knows," said Lady Judith, with a smile. "But she has been contented. Letty is not always very cheerful."

"Indeed, Sophy has been perfectly happy. It has done her great good. She is a dear girl, most useful, I'm sure, but I should be so glad to see her married."

"You don't go to town very early ever, I think."

"No. Lord Dynham goes. He must—the House, you know. But he goes as little as he can till I am there. The expense is great, and having no daughters, and I really like the country, and a little later one sees everybody, and one can get off to some sea-place, or the Continent, before the shooting; perpetually moving about is so unsatisfactory—but we have so much enjoyed ourselves in this beautiful place. I wonder you can bear to leave it."

"It is a very beautiful place," said Lady Judith, complacently. "But we spend the winters in town generally."

It suits both Peter and myself. And I can't do without London in the season either, I am afraid. Of course you will have Sophy with you in town?"

"She says she would rather not go out much. Her mother claims her for a few weeks; but if we go abroad I shall want her. I can hardly tell how it will be managed just at present. We give our yearly ball at Dynely in September, as usual, and must get back for that. I want to spend the winter there."

"I like Dynely; it is in one of the best parts of England—I always think that Gloucestershire combines so much. And to be quite frank, I don't like your Yorkshire place. I should let it."

"Oh, but Lord Dynham being Yorkshire by his mother inherits the infatuation. He likes moors and crags, and Yorkshire hunting, and grouse—and everything else that is Yorkshire. But of course Dynely is *home*."

"I hate stones," said Lady Judith. "But whenever Sophy can be spared I should like to have her on a visit; here, or in London—anywhere; I like her gentle ways."

"Thank you. You would do her good. We can't leave her at Dynely by herself. My sister wrote to me to fix for Sophy going with her to the sea, but I said Sophy had had the sea here, and that that would be enough."

"Mrs. Vellacomb, then, is not tied to her cupboards and her rusty and dusty state."

"Oh dear, no. It is only in her business hours that she is to be seen. She is as saving on herself as if she had not ten pounds a year for clothes, and she manages for her husband as if he were a prince. I suspect he seldom sees her as I do. You know Laura never had even a woman's natural love of display, and yet she had good taste, and was devoted to comforts. She was always rather an oddity, if you remember. They have a house at Seacombe; she likes sending the children there, and getting off Mr. Vellacomb at all sorts of unrecognized times for the refreshment of fresh air. She manages it all. It is a pretty spot, all cottagy, with lavender and sweet brier in the summer, and with a sea-breezy scent all over everything, and not a bit of grandeur about it; pink chintz and white muslins, and all her red-tape parcels and books, and letters go with her: she has always a pen in her hand, I think, and I really believe her husband worships her—but such a life!"

Again Lady Judith gave one of her short low laughs. "What a slave to good works!"

No one could have told her real feeling, either from her manner or her words. Perhaps she had at last learnt to laugh all things to scorn—nobody knew. But she went on speaking, and in a more natural tone she said, "I suppose it is impossible to keep some women from good works, if the power can be grasped for doing them. It is well that it should be so. Mrs. Vellacomb is happy now; and yet when she was Mr. Cerescau's wife she was not happy. She had then one thing to practise in her life—self-denial; it was clear to everybody that she could not do it without that crying aloud which revealed the suffering. So Mr. Cerescau died, and she married the merchant, and fell violently in love with him; and now of her own choice sits in a back parlour, and keeps accounts, and is rusty and dusty—the best of wives and mothers, and in excellent spirits. But she is respectable, and has power. I suppose that is what we all like, *power* and respectability; the power to buy gold and diamonds, and then we are found to prefer aluminium bronze, and a bit of crystal, and take a comfortable stand upon our own respectability."

"Well, I don't know," said Lady Dynham, who scarcely understood Lady Judith's generalizing. "I always thought Laura odd. And yet she wanted to be great, always, and to have a position; and she would never have married Mr. Cerescau but for the wealth to which he was heir. But it is very difficult, and always has been, as far as I know, to be great in any way."

"You are quite wrong," said Lady Judith, rising up; "it is not very hard to achieve greatness; any woman can secure some sort of greatness if she have courage, or perhaps impudence, which may do as well; but the really hard thing to attain is respectability. I am quite sure that Mrs. Vellacomb is in the right, and happier than either of us. And be sure that you bring Sophy to town, and send her to see me. I shall call on the Cleverleighs; I have not seen them for years. I like Sophy very much; she has been a most agreeable guest. And — oh, look! There they come, toiling up the zig-zag path from the beach to the point there. Do you see—three men and two girls? It must be them. Are you inclined to go and meet them?"

So the two ladies finished their gossip, and ended their

last words; and soon Lady Judith might have been seen walking back with her hand on Sophy's arm.

When they got to the house Lady Judith looked at Letty. "Child, how pale you are! You are so imprudent. You go too much into the sun. Mr. Drake, do look at Letty!"

Lady Judith spoke coldly, almost angrily. Letty stumbled against her father, and fainted away in his arms.





CHAPTER XXIV.

LIFE OR DEATH.

The history of our lives, when written by ourselves, is always profoundly affecting.—*Hôtel du Petit St. Jean.*

THE next day Letty was very ill. She had always had perfect health, and to have her alarmingly ill was something that seemed to shake the life in every one around her. And then, too, it was despair—it was incomprehensible. Why should it happen, and what could any one do?

Of course the doctor came. It was very mysterious; it was over-fatigue, and the brain had been over-taxed; it was exposure to the sun; it was that morning in the boat; it was the toiling up the cliff, and it was eating no breakfast; and it was all Mr. Drake's fault.

"Of course it was his fault. He never made any allowances for Letty. He always worked her head and hands up to their utmost possibility. Those pamphlets on the currency—which had actually got him the offer of a seat in Parliament, which of course he had refused, as he always did refuse everything that was worth having—had been spoken by him as he walked up and down the room, and Letty had written them from such dictation. And then it was not English only, but Greek and Latin; and as to German, it was a mercy that she had learnt it as she learnt English, or she must have died of it. And Mr. Drake may well thank his stars for a daughter—a son certainly would have been no use to *him*. He was incapable of thinking of any one but himself."

In spite of all the restraint that Lady Judith really did put upon herself, these statements would be poured forth; and that Peter Drake was simply idiotic when sickness was in the house was so perfectly true, that the current of surrounding opinion went against him, and in silent misery

he shut himself up from his guests, only creeping into his child's room to look at her when she dozed, and there, by her bedside, he of course found Miss Teague. Lady Judith had sent for her.

"Thank you—thank you," Lady Judith had said, holding out both hands gratefully on her arrival. "You have had to do with them all from the beginning. She is horribly ill—and oh! don't talk to me of Mr. Drake! You know very well he is the most self-sufficient man that ever was born—oh! yes, you know, and you look so guilty. If you make me laugh for a single instant, I—even I—may have an hysteric; but so it is, and what he was as a youth he still is—as it was in the beginning—Alas! alas! But self-sufficiency is inefficiency—cause and effect. If *you* can't nurse Letty back to life, no one can. I never was good at nursing, and Letty does not love me." Miss Teague looked scared. Lady Judith kissed her. "Go now," she said, with the tears running down her face—"go now, and do your best. Heaven alone can help a woman whose life is sacrificed to a man like Peter Drake!"

It was exactly Miss Teague's opinion, but it was terrible to hear the truth from Lady Judith's lips. "It is enough to make one mad to lose everything," said the poor lady.

After the first confusion of the sudden danger of death into which Letty Drake had fallen, there came to the guests in that house a moment of standing still, as it were, and of asking—"What shall we do?"

Without coming to any very exact answer, Lady Dynham began the business of packing up as speedily as could be managed. "There can be no more dinner-parties, no more going from home; we can get ready for departure, and then, if anything should happen——"

If anything should happen! It is such a convenient phrase, and it had now come to the fact that it could be applied most appropriately to poor Letty's case. So the Dynhams remained, but in readiness for what might occur—life or death; it was a narrow choice, but for many days no human intelligence could declare which thing it was to be.

When Lady Judith found that the Dynhams considered it necessary to be prepared for a sudden departure, she spoke out fearlessly.

"Don't go—don't, I beseech you, make any arrangements to oblige you to go. You can see how it is; if Lord Dynham

went, Peter would have no one to speak to. A silent life is bad for everybody. No people know that truth more perfectly than those who have to experience it. For goodness' sake, stay! It is all very well to be ready to go, only don't go—that's all."

Then Lady Dynham promised to remain to the end of that three weeks that had been talked about, and, "We shall get up to town in June, you know," she said to her solemn-looking spouse, with one of her most tranquil smiles.

Lord Dynham was really a comfort to Mr. Drake, and Lady Judith was quite right when she said it was good for Peter to have some one to speak to. She knew, by a woman's intuitive sense of what must be, which is quicker, and very often truer than reasoning, that if they were left alone, the silence and the suffering, of which they could not speak, would widen the separation between them; and Lady Judith, to do her justice, did not wish that.

She could not trust herself not to blame Mr. Drake; she could not trust Mr. Drake to take her hard words gently. Things, as they were now between them, were decent and respectable, and it had been a respectability very hard to gain. The presence of other people would prevent discord, and she exerted herself to keep the Dynhams, and to make the house as pleasant as it could be. She thanked them honestly, and they were surprised into being her friends—pleased, too, at the new consequence that their position as comforters seemed to give to them. Nothing half as kind or as cousinly had ever been experienced at Trederrick before, and they both found themselves feeling and saying that they were very glad to stay.

Every morning Lord Belton went up the crag-path with news as to how Letty had passed the night.

Every afternoon they came down from Coombe to know as to the progress made in the day.

Sophy Cerescau was as useful as if she had inherited her mother's talent for doing all manner of good; and when Letty's delirious head grew still, and her eyes once more wore the habitual look of peace, Miss Teague wondered as to whether those hours of deadly fear had not brought blessings with them which it might take all life to count.

Good old Sir Harry had come over again and again from Marsland, to hear with his own ears, he said, the truth about Peter's child. Mrs. Carteray had had pleasant welcomes, and been indulged in long talks about her hero and stepson.

The great Gregsham will case was coming on immediately. It was complicated with a run-away match, and a death that could not be proved—with a possible claimant if a marriage register could be found, and an obstinately expectant heir-at-law; and, after all, and above all, it was not clear whether Miss Gregsham—for it was a woman's will, of course—had had any right to dispose of this enormous property at all. This one final trial was certainly to decide everything, and the whole legal world, and every Gregsham to the furthest generation, was waiting on Cecil Carteray's speech.

That seemed to be the state of things. Mr. Drake listened with interest, Lord Dynham with the politest attention, and Lord Belton declared that to be in such a place, and to be found equal to such a charge, was something worth living for.

"It is work!" exclaimed the young man. "Work! After all, work is a famous thing!"

"Don't mistake vanity for industry, Lord Belton," says Miss Teague. "I am afraid you are feeling as if you could be proud."

She smiles very pleasantly on this young man whom she likes, and he comes to her and sits beside her. "Do you know, if I had anything to do, I think that I could do it," he says.

"How very dreadful!"

"What is dreadful?"

"Your ignorance."

"Are you joking? I so seldom get a talk with you; and yet I am hearing of you perpetually."

"Because I have done what I had to do, I suppose. In a very bungling way often enough; but when one tries, somehow one succeeds, I think."

"But that does not explain what you are pleased to call my ignorance."

"I think it does. You have something to do, and have not, at more than twenty-one years of age, found out what it is."

"I have to live."

"Which means eating, drinking, sleeping, and walking. You certainly do all that."

"And to marry."

Miss Teague opened her eyes very wide. "It is such an opportune moment for a proposal. I can only regret that I

am not the happy lady. No doubt your ignorance extends also to that part of your destiny?"

"Alice Penwarne," said Lord Belton, in a very low voice. "Will you tell me if she is engaged to Hugo? I do not ask it idly. I want to know. I can't ask any one but you; and I have wanted to ask you several days."

"That is a long time," said Miss Teague. "There is no engagement—no captivity to any body. Lord Belton, she is three years younger than you——"

"Ten years younger, I should say," he said, smiling. "I know you are going to say that her life, and all she has seen, has made her older than her years; but whatever may be the case, I feel old enough to take my place in her life, and I will do it if I can. Now let us listen to Mrs. Carteray. I am so much obliged to old Miss Gregsham for her stupid will. I should never have said this to you but for her."

"And what good has speaking to me done you?"

"How can you ask? It has added fact to feeling."

Then he walked away, and Miss Teague thought she liked him very much.

"What have you been saying to Miss Teague, sir?" said old Sir Harry. "You have made her eyes bright, and rouged her cheeks. Here she comes. You are on trial—speak."

"We have talked of work. I was envying Mr. Carteray."

"Ah! yes." Sir Harry looked well pleased.

"And Miss Teague says that, if I were in his place, my vanity and ignorance would be the ruin of me."

"Quite right, Miss Teague!" And the old man laughed merrily. "Keep these young boys in order."

But Miss Teague had ceased to think Lord Belton a boy; and she had nothing to say in answer to old Sir Harry.

She went back to Letty with messages from her friend; she told her about Cecil Carteray.

Letty was lying on a sofa near the window, where a thick blind shaded her from both sun and light. She lay so much in the shade, that the slight nervous twitching of the face, when Cecil's name was mentioned, could not be seen. Letty listened with her eyes closed, and her thin hands clasped patiently underneath her cashmere shawl.

"Does it tire you to be told these things?" asked Miss Teague, with her gentle voice.

"I want to hear," gasped the girl, with voiceless lips.

Then she was told all that was as yet known; and she thanked Miss Teague softly.

"Will you try to sleep?"

"Yes. I can sleep now." And so she was left, and she did sleep, dropping, as it were, into a trance of prayer and patience, which ended in the peace of a child-like slumber.

In this way, in the midst of a great tranquillity, Letty got better—well enough for the doctor to leave her to Miss Teague's care; and to the continued quietness which was declared to be absolutely necessary to her restoration.

"How long have I been ill?" she asked one day; and she was told that it was almost three weeks since the day of her fainting in the hall. "How kind everybody has been. How much illness teaches us of other people's goodness! How good Sophy is!"

Yes, Sophy had been very good. Through all that terrible time of fear, when neither father nor mother could be of any use, Sophy had waited on Miss Teague, and shared in all her labours. She had been so quick, kind, and clever—so much more intelligent than any servant not instructed in the mysteries of sick nursing could have been, that everybody was grateful to her; and there had been a general feeling in the house that not even the all-sufficient Miss Teague could have done without Miss Cerescau.

Lady Judith felt it as much as any one. She thanked her in words which were not many, but which meant a great deal. "We shall get to London some time, I suppose. Letty is to be left at Coombe. We may not be away very long; but let me see you—see as much of you as possible in town, Sophy. Promise me that." And Sophy promised, and felt that she had ceased to be afraid of Lady Judith; and that she was never again going to be dumb in the presence of Mr. Drake.

Still, Letty was kept upstairs, in cool rooms, with the sun kept out, and in great quietness. Still the doctor said that, in her continued state of weakness, there was danger of a relapse, if any kind of imprudence was committed; and still Lord Belton went up the crag-path to carry the morning news to Coombe.

Still letters were flying all over the country to one friend and another, with Letty's state and condition as a principal topic. Everybody was talking, or writing, or thinking of that beautiful, educated, talented, wonderful Miss Drake,

who had been out in a boat most imprudently, and walked up a steep cliff-side in a broiling June day, and nearly died of a sunstroke; and Mrs. Carteray wrote every week to Cecil.

He was fond of a clever woman's letter-writing, and he enjoyed hers: and she told him how imprudent Letty had been, and how the fatigue had been so great, and the effect of the sun so tremendous, that she had only had power just to reach the house, when she was struck down in the hall. "All this happened the day after you left us," said Mrs. Carteray, in her first letter.

Week after week the accounts went to London; the second week she was obliged to say that Letty remained in great danger. The head was affected somehow—the prostration complete; Mr. Drake in perfect misery; and Lady Judith quite a changed woman to her neighbours. "Almost as pleasant to *them*, for a wonder, as she has chosen always to be to *you*," she could not help adding, just to make Cecil smile. - And then she went on, "Most unexpectedly, but not to any one's surprise, I suppose, if all I hear is true, Captain Penwarne arrived yesterday at Coombe. He came of course on Letty's account. And another thing that has come to light is that every bit of the unentailed property has been for several years mortgaged up to its utmost value, so that if this expected marriage between Hugo and Letty does not come off—only everybody says it will—poor Letty will be left on her father's death a mere dependent on her mother, whose jointure is well secured somehow. Of course Eleanor thinks she had better die if she does not marry, than suffer that; but in justice to Lady Judith I must add that Eleanor has been to Trederrick several times, and has not gone through any kind of annihilation, either by torturing words or scathing smiles. And now for myself. I had better say that I suppose I could not write quite in this way if our afternoon account of Letty had not been an improved one. Sophy Ceresau has turned out quite a treasure, and of course no one could have done without Miss Teague."

What kind of a man that was who received these letters it would be difficult to say.

Cecil Carteray always read them most attentively; and when he read them he was always alone. These letters would come sometimes when he was immersed in papers and reading. Then he would rise up quietly, and put the letters under lock and key till the work of the day was done; at which time he would take them again into his

hands and read them over once, never more than once, but once with slowness and thoughtful deliberation, before he held them to a lighted taper and reduced every scrap to ashes.

That letter Cecil Carteray destroyed by fire, as he had destroyed the others, with slow and sure deliberation and care.

If Letty wished her short period of perfect joy to become as though it had never been, if she wasted weary moments in wishing for the impossible, he too wished it with self-pity as deep and equally loaded with regret. But she, in her weakness, could not slay her past; it lived and poisoned her present, and drew tears from her tortured memory. He simply had made up his mind to live his life, and not try to strive with fate. He pitied the Cecil Carteray of a few weeks back, but never gave a sigh to the man he had become. All he knew was that his mind was made up. He was not only not going to marry Letty, but he had ceased to wish to marry her. A great career was before him. Once he had striven for success for her sake, and when it came it was for her that he was glad; now he would have success for its own sake, and such success as was before him was worth having. A man had to live; it would be pleasantest to live among the plaudits of his fellow-men, reaping the harvest of golden gains. So he burnt his letters, and walked out to refresh himself for his next day's work.

So it was with Cecil when Letty was asking Miss Teague, "How long is it? How long since I was taken ill?"

They were alone now at Frederrick, and Hugo had been allowed to see Letty twice. She used to be carried into her mother's boudoir, and then the Coombe relatives had been allowed to see her. She had seen Hugo twice, with only Miss Teague in attendance; and Hugo, to amuse her, had talked of the great Gregsham will case, and Cecil Carteray.

"Does it tire you?" "Do you like to hear about it?" they had asked her; and her gentle answer came to both always the same, "Yes; very much."

After he was gone she would have her couch removed to where she could look out on the afternoon sunlight gilding the great cliffs, and see the sleepy sea and the rocking boats of the village fishermen. She looked over the high elm tops, and between the masses of green which their grouping made to the little bay on whose sandy bank Miss Teague so loved to sit, and think of the footsteps that come into our lives and go out of them. Letty had heard her fanciful

chat, and the remembrance of things she had said came back to her now; and with the ebb and flow of thought there came that thought which she had determined, very often to drive away for ever—the thought that Cecil might come back.

Now surely there is nothing more dreadful than the cry, the wail of Hope. He will return, I know he will! Poor heart! If its secret is known, then every other heart knows better. But how long belief holds on! How long Hope lives, feeding on itself! When it dies it is generally suddenly, because some event occurs which comes like a blow and declares the truth. The blow falls on heart and head, and then people say, What is the matter? She knew it ever so long ago!

But it was not to be quite in this way with Letty. She suffered the sorrows of hope but a little time. Another month passed. Six weeks. Then the papers were full of the great case, and Cecil Carteray had won his cause. His stepmother came to Trederrick to hear his praises; and Mr. Drake and Lady Judith made their congratulations. Everybody talked of him. Everybody was vexed that he had not come down to be looked at again. It vexed Mrs. Carteray; but he had joined a charming party. He wrote of nothing but the Rhine.

One of his letters to Mrs. Carteray had been brought by her to Letty to read. It contained marginal illustrations of the contents. But Letty would not look. It dropped from her couch to the ground, and Mrs. Carteray picked it up again.

Then some words went to Cecil as to Letty's listlessness. She could not even be interested in him—their hero. But she was going to stay at Coombe. The Drakes had given her up to Mrs. Penwarne, who seemed delighted to have charge of her. It was supposed to be quite a settled thing, therefore, between her and Hugo. But nothing could be said of course till she was recovered. She had been so dreadfully ill.

And Letty went to Coombe, and she took no hope with her. Hope was dead of exhaustion. And the world was empty.

Oh! the emptiness of a world when a girl's love has gone away from her. No one living on her smiles; no man caring for her heart; alone—alone—alone unto the end!



CHAPTER XXV.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

Clouds threaten—but a ray of light,
And not of lightning, falls below.

FROM THE ARABIC.

SOMETIMES it strikes one as a wonder that we have so little knowledge of ourselves. Seeing that self is a book which we never part from, and which is always at hand to study, is it not marvellous that we should know so little of the things to be revealed by it?

It would seem to be unwise, or perhaps to be absolute folly, to seek for self-knowledge from the young.

Youth should know right from wrong; youth should be willing to repent of a wrong, and to determine to amend it, and to prefer right. But as to self-knowledge, it may generally be summed up in two exclamations—"Oh! I wish I hadn't!" and "I wish I had!"

And it is in this state of things that the great happiness of youth consists. For the young are happy because they are vague; and they are vague because they are young.

Life lies before them with its work, its prizes, its evils, its good; life is theirs to do as they will with. Let it never be forgotten that life is with the young. The young have the power of choice, the ability, the strength, the *time* to work. They look across the great plain, and say, Which way? Where shall we go? What shall we do?

When people are old enough to make up their minds as to what is to be, to them, *good*; when they have determined, then strife comes. They are fighting for something. Repose is gone. The glorious sense of power unused. strength

uninjured, and the freedom of an unconquered will, is no more. Anxiety is come; they are growing old. Alas! how many of us know it. Is not Ignorance the life of youth, because it is the food of hope?—and are not Knowledge and Experience always grey-headed?

Mr. Drake and Lady Judith had left Trederrick, and Letty was at Coombe; but many things had happened before the month of June had counted out its thirty days, and some of them must be told.

Letty had had to be very carefully prepared for her removal, and she had stayed at Trederrick under Miss Teague's charge at her own desire, for three or four days after the departure of her parents. Their going had been fixed by the occurrence of a scientific meeting, at which her father was expected to be present, and Letty had said, "Leave me here. I shall like the peace of the empty house for a few days. Then, some cool afternoon, I can be driven to Coombe and find rest there till you come back. Give me my own way, please; Miss Teague will take care of me."

Her father was glad to go, quite convinced that for Miss Teague to take possession of his child was the greatest good that could befall her; and Lady Judith was dreadfully sensible that she had nothing to do at home, and that the best arrangement possible was the very natural one of departing in the same carriage with her husband.

But before this departure which left Letty at rest, there had been other things in their lives—the departure of the Dynham family, and, before that, the return of Hugo to Coombe. He had come, as has been said, on hearing of Letty's illness, from a feeling of true sympathy. Mrs. Penwarne had written to him when Letty was at the terrible danger point, and he had come down the very next day. A letter telling of his intention had reached Coombe at three o'clock in the afternoon, and Hugo had entered the house at seven in the evening.

"Somehow," he said, "I could not stand being away. I am come just because I liked to come. I know I can't be any good to anybody. But as the music was all out of time, and the dancing a bore—and as, I declare, I actually could not eat my dinner, I thought I would just come back. Of all things on earth, you know, I hate waiting for the post. And that was just it; you know I should have been waiting for the post all day." And Hugo looked aggrieved, and as if he was much to be pitied.

The man was welcome at Coombe. That was the simple truth; and he was welcome at Trederrick, too, where he had spent many mornings before he was allowed to see Letty.

The morning after he got to Coombe, he was standing in his usual way on that lawn from which the crag-path descended—but not, as in old times, with Alice; she was sitting in the morning room close by the open window.

"Here is Belton—he has come up by the crags," said Hugo to her.

A thrill went through Alice's nerves. In the first place, this was the only time Hugo had been alone with her, and spoken to her in the old voice, since the morning on the bridge; and the familiar, unconstrained tone shot through her brain. She could not tell whether the sensation was pleasure or pain; she had not time to consider the question; she could only answer—"Lord Belton brings us daily news of Letty;" and then she walked out and across the lawn to meet him. Hugo walked quite naturally by her side.

"They hope she is better. She has been watched all night. Mr. Morrington"—he was a very clever man, a surgeon in extensive practice, the son of that doctor who had long ago asked Miss Teague to be his wife—"Mr. Morrington says the whole aspect of affairs is favourable at present. But it is a mysterious sort of illness, and he has said so. I have left him in confidential talk with Miss Teague, who is about the greatest blessing you have here, I should say."

"That is a Penwarne belief," said Alice, smiling. She looked at Hugo. He was looking at Lord Belton—the slim, handsome youth rubbing the rich-coloured curls from his white forehead. A thought came into Hugo's head at that moment, but he did not show it in his face. "Take care," he said, "you will fall in love with Miss Teague, if you don't. I did, at eight years old, and my case has been desperate ever since."

Lord Belton blushed up to his eyebrows. Hugo's calm eyes saw it all. "I think I'm proof," said the youth.

"At any rate, you are warned. But I am going to her. I could not be here an hour longer without seeking an interview."

Hugo walked away and left Lord Belton and Alice together, and Alice felt another thrill run through her brain. Once he would not have gone. But why should he not go? She

had examined herself, and said she liked to be free. She had been brought up in a captivity, sweet and gentle, it is true, but still captivity; and she had said that she liked to be free. The glory of youth lay in its power to choose. This power had come to her, endowing her not only with freedom, but strength. She was convinced that she enjoyed her womanhood. How should Hugo have power over her? "It is strength of old habits of thought," said Alice, answering her inquiring head and trembling heart. "Peace!—nonsense!" and she turned with a smile to Lord Belton.

When Hugo reached Miss Teague's cottage, he found, to his joy, that she was at home.

"I feared that I should not find you," he said. "You are only just back from Trederrick, I know. Am I in the way?"

"No," she said. "I think you couldn't be."

Then he told her how and why he had come back. "But she is really better, I find"—speaking of Letty—"I heard Belton's account just now."

"It will be a long time before she is strong. She is to come to Coombe."

"I think Alice will marry Belton," said Hugo very quickly. Miss Teague looked at him with wide-open eyes. There was a moment's silence; then Hugo said, "Speak to me."

"I am quite sure he admires her," she said, "but I know no more."

There was again a silence, and this time it was broken by Miss Teague. "Of course *you* have given her up."

"I never said so."

"You said as much."

"Never! I said that the love I had believed in was not there. I said my life was wasted. I asked, as I still ask, why, as she must have understood it always—why she took all for so long only to put me on proof at last. But I never said I had given her up. There is surely a difference between awaking from a dream, and founding a strong resolution upon an unexpected disappointment."

"Then you would now really marry Alice?"

"If she loved me, I would. I want her to love me—that's what I want," said Hugo simply.

"I can't see why you should suppose that she would now prefer Lord Belton, however."

"Belton's terms would be different. He would marry her

because *he* loved *her*. He is a very good fellow, and he would make her an excellent husband. But, after all, though I began the subject, I think I won't talk about it. Colonel Penwarne asked me to speak to her again. But what I want is not got by persuasion, so I left her and Belton on the lawn together. Perhaps they are settling it."

"Perhaps," echoed Miss Teague. "Now come with me to the farm."

Their talk was of oxen, and Mrs. Ferris was in her glory. Geraldine Graham lay in the shadow of the gable-end, enjoying the outer air, with a table by her side, on which rested her emaciated, transparent hand. Hugo had always plenty to say to her, as well as to Mrs. Ferris;

"And mirthful sayings, children of the place,
That had no meaning half a league away,"

were ready on his lips.

Mrs. Graham was reading a volume of Tennyson's poems, which he had given to her, and she began to thank him for it.

"It is so pleasant to have the things one has felt put into sweet words for one. That is one of the differences between the writer and the reader, I think. I know it; he tells me what I know, gives the thought back, and adds to its preciousness. Little, simple things sometimes; but it is so pleasant to have them stay with me. Now he calls the shadow 'that dim day,' and here I stand in it, partly made by the end of the house, and the great old honeysuckle branches that are pinned against it, and partly by that grand growing cedar the other side of the garden wall. It paints the outlines of its feathery top on the flat paving-slates of this courtyard, and I watch the wind playing with them every day. I'm never tired of an odd thing like that—indeed, it rests me; and from my open window, there in the gable, I can hear the washing of the waves among the pebbles, and see the moonlight on the level sea: he says all those things too. Oh! I thank you for your gift, Captain Penwarne. I wonder sometimes if people who have more enjoy their plenty as much as I do my own two."

"I won't answer for the world at large, but as for us at Coombe, I can tell you that we enjoy the sight of

'the rounded moon
Thro' the tall oriel on the rolling sea,'
as much as you do."

"And, Captain," she said, in a changed voice—the gasping tone of such sickness unto death as she was suffering,—“when I am gone you will think of Joe. He is to go to his uncle. And I have left you trustee, as you let me. He will have full five hundred pounds; and if you will go on paying the insurance I begun, he will have over a thousand by the time he is twenty-one. Oh! you have been to me just the power I was longing after. When you first came near me, and told me to trust you about the boy, you just changed the whole world around me. You have made it easy to die! Could I say more?”

She looked at him with her eyes raying gratitude. He quickly promised her to fulfil her wishes. He gave a word of praise to Joe, and asked where he was.

“Out with the men, about the pilchard seines,” she said. “It is all work, manly work, knowledge and useful knowledge. He is a boy to get on.”

“Yes; I am sure of it.”

Mrs. Graham sank back, tired, and Hugo went to meet Mrs. Ferris and Miss Teague.

“Now step in higher side,” said Mrs. Ferris, on hospitable thoughts intent, and leading the way, “and take a bit of bread before you go. There’s butter, this morning’s butter, and morning’s milk too—though evening’s milk is always best, as you know; but I should be bad at a dairy if I broke that cream for anybody; and the Captain will drink a glass of cider, and I’ll make bold to say he never drinks better. I made that hogshead off one tree three years ago.”

“It is excellent cider. And I think I never saw such bread.”

“Oh! the bread is sure to be good. It was wetted with the rain that fell on Ascension Day. I catch it and keep it when heaven gives us the chance. And I have what will last till after harvest, please the Lord,” said Mrs. Ferris, reverently. And I’d ever give you my best, Captain Penwarne, for you are one of the good old sort, and have brought blessings into this house, as you know—and as I know too; and I make bold to thank you, though you are so quiet about it.”

“I drink your health, madam,” said Hugo, gaily, “and if you give such cider as this before luncheon, I shall have to avoid you, as dangerous company.”

“There! Hear him!” she cried. “Why, old Penwarne might have spoken it. It’s a far time back; but his jokes

are told among us still. Why, the Colonel, of all the old Penwurnes, is the gravest."

"And the greatest," said Hugo.

"And I like you for that, and know it's true. And let me tell you, young man, that the bringing up for the world of such a one as yourself is not the least of his glories."

When the hospitalities were at an end, Miss Teague and Hugo walked away. He talked well, and cheerfully; and as they stood together taking leave at her garden gate, she could not resist the temptation of saying, "You are not the least like the generally received idea of a disappointed man."

He paused for a moment, and then said, "I am not very good at this sort of self-examination. But I suppose that one must get into a certain sort of atmosphere before the bud of our hope can expand into the full flower. Now anything that destroyed the full flower would be bitterness and disappointment; but that did not happen. All my life I have worn this rose-bud in my breast. When it was forbidden to expand—when it couldn't, because there was none of the sunshine reckoned upon, then there was surprise and injury. I felt very much injured, you know."

"And now you have picked my best cloth-of-gold to pieces," said Miss Teague, smiling.

"Yes; I am very fond of flowers; and fond of talking nonsense—at least, to *you*! And if you can't understand simple English, which I have already tried, I must attempt the allegorical; and I have a right to a touch of the Eastern imagery."

"Good morning," she said. "But it is wonderful how much may be contained in common words. Hugo felt as if she had given him a blessing. And he got back to Coombe in a very improved state of mind."

The vague time of life was over with him, and possibly—possibly—it suddenly occurred to him, it might only be—as to Alice—because she was young.





CHAPTER XXVI.

SPEAK!

But were I joined to her,
Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything,
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live.

TENNYSON.

DAY after day passed on after Hugo's return to Coombe, bringing with every morning Lord Belton, with news of Letty. Thus things went on, till a certain afternoon, when Hugo and Colonel Penwarne were away together, and Alice was sitting at the Holly-seat alone. She heard, as before she had heard, some one advancing on the path below her. On which she rose up, and with quick, practised steps, she reached the lawn, and went with speed across the grass towards the open window, intending to get into the room. But Lord Belton was by her side before the refuge was reached; and he entered the room with her.

"I wish you had stayed at the Holly-seat. It would have been pleasanter there than here."

"I had been there some time," she said; "and now I will tell my mother you are here."

"In a moment," he said. "I should like to see her; but I can't let you go till you have heard it." And he smiled, bravely looking her in the face in a way which made her tremble, for she felt, as she had often felt lately, that in truth she was weak, and that he—the youth she had begun with by treating as a boy—was very strong. He was indeed strong in his great sincerity and truth, and he now said, "I want to hear something very pleasant from you—the

pleasantest word I can ever hear. The word I will never forget to thank you for saying as long as I live, and for which I will repay you by my worship and love all my life long. I want you to say, 'Yes.' I ask you to be my wife."

She sat down trembling, dreadfully confused, miserably unable to speak, feeling reduced to nothing in the presence of this bold-spoken lover, whose honesty seemed to be strong enough to carry everything before it.

Even then it came to her how differently she had felt and behaved when Hugo spoke. Even then she sighed because she had not known life's best good, and so lost him. "My ignorance lost him," she said to herself. "I did not know that I could not order the world as I pleased; not till he came back again did I really understand that *I couldn't* have him now." The tears stood in her eyes. She stared at Lord Belton, a picture of beautiful woe, with her mind full of Hugo, and all the trouble that thickened round her; and yet her only sin was youth.

She felt the awkwardness of the moment acutely; yet she was speechless—like one incapable. Vexed, too, and angry with herself because she could not keep the present good from mixing with the mistaken past. Perhaps it had been left to that moment, and to the light of that experience, to convince her that her past was indeed mistaken; that she had loved Hugo, and had trifled with herself. So silence was all that met Lord Belton; and no other answer came to his brave words except the mute eloquence of two great tears.

It was what people call a trying moment.

"I could not have gone away without speaking to you. You did not expect that I should. You have known what was in my mind. You know how the thought that had quickly become the hope of my life grew in your presence. You knew what brought me to you every day——"

"Don't speak so, please."

"I am not wanting to trouble you. I only want you to understand that I have never presumed on kindness. Every word more than common acquaintance required, every hour of intercourse more than might be allowed to our friendship, everything I permitted myself to say, or to accept, I determined to redeem by the words I have just said. I could not have gone away without speaking. We have been brought very near together. Our knowledge of each other has

ripened very quickly—I can't repent speaking. But now shall we both be silent for a time?"

Alice remained so still, and so seemingly incapable of utterance, that Lord Belton could only suggest this as the best arrangement for the moment. He was utterly puzzled, and could only think that Alice was ill.

But the idea of silence roused her. That, certainly, would never do. She got up, and held fast by the table. She looked him in the face; and to see his sweet open countenance so charged with earnestness and dashed with a puzzled anxiety touched her, for she liked him very much.

"Don't justify yourself. Forgive me for being so weak. I am not well to-day, I suppose. I am sure it is a great honour to a woman to be loved by so true-hearted a man——"

"Never mind that," he said, in his honest, hurrying, boyish way, which always made her smile. "Say Yes."

"I cannot say Yes. Oh! it is so hard!" she cried.

"What is hard?" he asked.

"It is so hard to know that a man you like very much will one day put a question to you which gives no choice as to its reply but—*all or nothing*."

He laughed. Actually he looked in her face and laughed. He thought that he had learnt a great deal by what she had said—he thought that she was irresolute.

"I will tell you what to say," he replied smilingly, "what to say to *me*, now."

She looked up with asking eyes.

"Say *No*," he said.

She was silent.

"Say it when I tell you," he went on, as if she had been a baby; and she with a changed voice obeyed him.

"No," she said with a gasp.

He offered his hand. She took it, gazing at him wonderingly.

"Good-bye, Alice. Do you remember my reading *Genevieve*—the first time I read aloud to you on the crag-path? We talked of changing *No* into *Yes*. Good-bye." And he went out by the open window and across the lawn, disappearing in a moment by the way he had come.

Then Alice sat down, strangely troubled; and all she knew of herself seemed to be this—that she might marry Lord Belton if she pleased, and that she loved Hugo too well to marry any one else. It was enough to know, if not

too much. When her mother came into the room she told her only part of her discoveries. In answer to the alarmed, "My darling, what is the matter?" she replied, "Oh, nothing—yes; that is, mother, Lord Belton has been here; but I can't—I can't—I don't think I can marry him."

"An uncertain mind on that subject will never do," said Mrs. Penwarne, in a fright.

"Oh, I said *No*," cried Alice.

"And what did he say?"

"That he would try and turn *No* into *Yes*." And then Alice again broke down, and this time she finished her troubles on her mother's breast.

When the grief was over, and it was afternoon, Mrs. Penwarne said gently, "Why did you cry, dear?"

"Because I was tired, vexed, bored, worn out!"

"Worn out! With the love-making?"

"It is beginning to dawn on me that I am marked out for tribulation, and that women are much to be pitied. Of course I knew it was coming, but I could not help it."

"A man has a right to speak," said Mrs. Penwarne. "But don't let life go wrong with you."

"When is life wrong?"

"When we make other people's lives go wrong; when women gain love thoughtlessly, refuse carelessly, grow hard and unfeeling towards everybody."

"It would be so delightful," said Alice with a sigh, "if we could always love everybody and admire each other fearlessly, up to the full size of our hearts, and the whole strength of our judgment."

"Why, yes," answered her mother, meditatively; "but that is just heaven above. You must have patience, my dear."

"I think we must not talk about Lord Belton. I think we must not tell even my father. Because—because—somehow, it is all nothing. He asked for *Yes*, and I could not speak; then he told me to say *No*, and I said it—said it at last," said Alice, truthfully. "Somehow, as I said, it is all nothing."

"Let it stay so, then. I see no cause for any talking. My knowing is enough, and good for you."

"Oh, very good!"

"Let us walk to the pines."

So they went up into the shade, and spoke of other things.

The following day the Dynham party left Trederrick, and preparations began for the departure of Mr. Drake and Lady Judith.

Letty lay in her room very peaceful, and in that state when it is felt to be both wise and pleasant to let life pass by.

The danger in which this girl had been had created a great sympathy, and her father had never felt what the love of the poor meant till he was in danger of losing the love of his child. Even Lady Judith had come into harmony with surrounding souls, and had broken the hard, cruel, unsympathizing silence of her life in this hour of fear. But, to be exactly true, it must be said that the really poor had always admired Lady Judith. They called her a high lady; but they had a certain sort of property in her, and they got glory out of her costly clothing, and would not have felt half as proud of her exalted rank if she had flung her smiles about with thoughtless liberality. Every, the smallest, thing connected with Lady Judith was a circumstance, and her words were stored up as sentences full of instruction, like a moral law. But the old-fashioned, true-hearted villagers felt differently towards Mr. Drake—their own Peter, as he had been by birth, but never their own by any other tie. A small-hearted, self-centred man, smooth and polished, and the same in his polite insincerity to every one. No one had had any property in him. They had left him to his book learning, scoffed over his too lavish expenditure, and ceased expecting any good out of him. He had never exhibited his virtues, and so they were ignorant of them; but they had found out all his faults. Everybody knew that he and “my lady” had never, as they called it, “put their horses together.” But they all felt that Mr. Drake was a cruel man; for the difference between coldness and cruelty was not visible to these lookers-on, and so they sympathized with the lady. The son had died in London, when they had been living but little at Trederrick; but when no other boy was born, Letty fell heir to all the pent-up traditional love of these many honest hearts, and the idea of her dying produced a tumultuous sympathy. The inquiries, the gifts, the offers of assistance, the persevering questioners, who *would* see Miss Teague, or one of the family, so overpowered Mr. Drake, that he confessed himself quite irritated by their interruptions; but Lady Judith looked on upon the whole case, thinking the wonder of it

over, and coming at last to the conclusion that it was *love*.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, with a heart-breaking sort of pleasantry—"perhaps, if I had been as much loved as these Penwornes and Letty, something might have been different." And then, when Mr. Drake wished that the poor people's demonstrations could be put a stop to, she said—"Really, if they like to walk up the hill this broiling weather, and bring us cabbage and bunches of sea-pink, I don't see any reason for preventing them. It is infinitely amusing. We have had new milk every night from Mrs. Ferris, the particular produce of her best cow, Syringa. No milk was ever like it. Letty has an amazing relish for it; and that most singular boy, called Joe, is admitted to see her, and she gathers up all the strength she is possessed of to speak to him in French."

"Well, I don't understand it," said Mr. Drake, in a semi-rough way he often used towards his wife, and she replied with an affected sweetness—"No more do I. But then homage never came in my way, you know." And this speech having sufficiently irritated him, he walked off angrily, and she sauntered out to the terrace; and her conscience said, "You are quite in the wrong."

Then, remembering where she had stood talking to Hugo, she went on to think of him. "These young people lead wholesome lives. Perhaps I might yield to the combined influence if Letty were to marry him. His preaching was to my mind; it came so naturally without a thought of preaching in it, though no sermon ever stuck by me so long. The life I was in, he said, was *my* life, and therefore the best life for me. He did not know that I make my life every morning to repent it every night. But nothing has ever done me so much good as Syringa, and the cabbage and the wild flowers; and Miss Teague and Letty being unaffectedly interested in talking French to that ridiculous Joe."

So came the murmurs from her heart to her lips. And yet this woman guessed the truth—that, not having the heaven-sent sympathy that binds together the husband and wife, all other loves seem barren, and all other sympathies absurd.

Lady Judith had, however, learnt to believe in the feelings that blessed other people's hearts, though she kept her own systematically empty. She knew that there was a

love acting as a living force to bind people together in one life, and she was glad the young should have it. But she kept herself in the dark land, and in the dead world beyond its power. Yet the many ways in which this love found utterance she had patience with. She let the poor come, and she respected their offerings. "Why should they not speak?" she said. "Let them speak!"





CHAPTER XXVII.

AT COOMBE.

'Tis sometimes natural to be glad,
And no man can always be sad,
Unless he will have it so.—JEAN INGELow.



WHEN Letty lay recovering from illness, feeling that she had passed the dangerous moments, and that life had been given back to her as by some mysterious new birth with a great struggle of which she bore the marks, and should for very long, perhaps, feel the strain—when the girl lay thus weak in body, and in an odd wonderment of mind, she felt a strong longing for happiness—to be happy again—once more! Nature was strong in these yearnings after joy; all her state of rest seemed filled with the desire, so full was her whole being of this longing that she made no bargain with life. She never said, give me this—or, I must have that. She did not care or calculate, or arrange her resolve; she only wanted to be happy; she did not care how, only to be happy once more! It was the first, sole, never ceasing yearning of nature; in her state of weakness—to be happy once more!

The doctor said she got well rapidly, more rapidly than he had expected after so strange, so unexplained an illness. He talked of shock and nerve-strain. He spoke wisely of how much youth can bear, of how hard it seemed to be for healthy youth to be really very ill for the first time. But he never disguised the certain truth of Letty having been in the dark valley, and of the shadow of death having dwelt in the pretty room at Trederick which Mrs. Penwarne had occupied in her girlhood.

Letty, at Coombe, was wheeled to the window now, and she looked out again over other great evergreens, and

through the opening the cedar branches made to the sea, which looked like a far-off lake twinkling in the evening light, and to a boat with silvery sails softened by distance, afloat like a thing asleep on its burnished surface.

This boat passed away, hidden by the trees, and another issued forth into that small world of light—another and another—each full of human hearts, only thinking of the toil of their bodies, the labour of their hands, and never guessing how they blessed the weary moments to a sick gazer's eyes, and amused her by the hour as she lay there watching. It made her smile to think of this. Perhaps we do not ever know all the pleasure we give—*nor the pain*. Then she shuddered, and prayed out of her heart a wordless prayer for happiness. She was very much afraid of sorrow. She had felt its pain. She would give up anything. Only she could not go about crushed and bruised, and sore and fearful all her life—and it was a secret. It was an odd way of putting it when she felt that she could suffer a great deal for another, but not for herself; yet, odd as it may seem, it was the exact truth, and all these prayers for happiness arose from a fear lest the thing she longed for should get out of reach, and leave her wrecked upon the rock of her secret wretchedness, in a life-long loneliness of heart. She would not be wretched then. She would give up that past—blot it out, and only remember it as *that* which had inflicted an almost deadly wound. So she came to that state when a human heart can say to a human brain that it shall not think. Her bodily weakness helped her; being in a new place helped her; the sight of the Coombe faces, even the furniture, and the out-of-door scenes, all known in one way, but new in another, helped her; the absence too of the home faces and voices; the home words and looks; the home atmosphere of independence and antagonism helped her. Coombe was the greatest possible contrast to Trederrick in many things both of the outward and inward life, and then too there was great comfort in being a guest among those she loved.

When the sun was off the lawn she was taken out to rest in a great easy chair in the corner where the laburnums grow. There Miss Teague would come and tell the news, read, talk, or sing with Alice and Mrs. Penwarne; and there Colonel Penwarne would walk up and down with Hugo in the afternoon, and no one complained of the fragrance that mingled with the scent of the jasmine and the breath of the mignonette.

Letty felt that everything helped her, and she was soon strong enough to go on the grey pony, by the bridge where the kingfishers built, to the village and the sands.

"The time of getting well is a very happy time," she said one day, as Hugo carefully led the pony over a stony part of a newly mended road.

"I am glad of it. Happiness is the best thing in the world."

"I almost think that these days are the sweetest of my life," said Letty. She was feeling the peace of the evening hour, the harmony of hearts amidst which she dwelt.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Hugo; then, repenting of his tone of surprise, he said, "You have escaped a danger. The feeling is, no doubt, a happy one, and even more——"

"But you too have been in danger?"

"I? Oh yes; in action, of course. But no such feeling as you are thinking of accompanies the knowledge of having escaped *that* death. In the first place, no man I suppose ever expects the danger to be his; and when the moment to be thankful comes, why of course he *is* thankful; but then there are so many gone! And to be happy would be a selfishness—you know you can be thankful and yet not sensibly glad."

"I understand you," she said. "But *I* am glad. I am very glad I did not die. And I have fought a battle," she said, smiling, "and I have won."

"May there be no further cause for victories."

"But you will always wish me success."

"Yes, always," he said with a laugh, glad to keep away from any very serious reflections. "Yes, always. Let us be successful ever, in love and war." Alice had been picking her way among the stones which had been cast most recklessly on this village road under a very mistaken notion of mending it, and she now came up to the pony's side, as Hugo, the pony having reached safe ground, let go the rein. She had heard his last words, and she looked up almost anxiously in Letty's face to see how she took them.

"I believe," said Letty, "that I shall be one of the women who go through life without falling in love; so that sort of success will never be mine."

Hugo knew he was talking now in the hearing of Alice; he said with a gay air, "You are ignorant. Success will not depend on *your* falling in love, but with men falling down and worshipping you."

"Oh, that's very hard," said Letty. "You have said two things—that happiness is the best thing in the world, and that your best wish for me is success. Can it be a success to anybody to make another feel—feel," her voice faltered; she was very nearly touching her own scarcely healed wound, "feel that the happiness of life is gone."

"I beg to correct you. The imaginary victim of your future will feel *not* that happiness of life is gone, but that *that* happiness which he had begun to prize most highly is gone. Love is no doubt happiness, but even love is not all the happiness of human life. Such a bringing down of the hopes of an honest man may therefore be a success."

"I would rather call it a very uncomfortable triumph," said Letty.

"In your case it would be a sinless one, I am sure," said Hugo.

"And he knows that I am listening," said Alice in her heart, "and he takes this way of saying he forgives me, and is happy."

On they went through the village, often stopping, or being stopped to ask questions and to receive congratulations. Letty was quite a queen enthroned in the hearts of the poor people. Her relations at Coombe had not known till her illness proved it, how deeply the people felt for the lovely girl who had been their benefactress from a child.

The pony was often stopped, and by suppliants sometimes, and she listened gravely and answered with instant help, wise suggestion, or promised favour.

She had lived her life among them, and Alice had not. It had always been part of Alice Penwarne's history among the Trederrick villagers that she had "lived in foreign parts."

Alice felt a sad sudden sense of inferiority, and it pained her. It pained her all the more because, for the first time, she felt that there existed a real ground for sympathy between Hugo and Letty. Hugo too had made great friends with the poor; and in a way from which she had been shut out. She had been all that she could be; but she had not lived among them as Letty had, and Hugo was to them the heir, the only man of the rising generation; and he bore the beloved old name. Alice felt strangely, and for the first time, that she was a great deal to the good old people, but of the three then standing among them she was last and least.

Letty liked her welcome and looked glad. She was very patient too, and heard without any attempt at interruption, all that Amy Cawdor, the great gossip of the village, had to say as to help wanted for a girl who had got a place in service but no clothes wherein to array herself for the coming occasion. Among Amy's griefs was one not to be remedied. She had offended Mrs. Ferris. In her own words, she had been to the farm to beg, and had called Mrs. Ferris "My Lady," and been severely rebuked by that stern critic and most acute observer.

"I told her how I had come because she knew my husband, and she said she did not recognise my husband by no means. Well, said I, my husband have been three years a corpse, but he has been upon the rick with your husband, years back, when he was your young man—that was in the Chronieler Davies' time, you know—and she give me half-a-crown," says Amy Cawdor, in a tone of sublime forgiveness.

"May Amy come to Coombe?" asked Letty.

"Why, of course I may," exclaims the indignant listener. "They are all Penwarnes." It was one of the undying privileges of the old name that its owners should belong to the poor.

Old Diggory came out on his crutches and balanced his body between them, as he bared his head, and stroked his silver locks in smiling recognition of Letty and her companions. He too had something to say of his sufferings, and claimed Letty as his right, she also having been ill. "Had a smart return of my old complaint; and I took rum and camomile, and gin and saltpetre, and got no good—not a mo'sel," with a sigh. "'Pon which I took a glass of the say-water, my dear, every morning fasting, and it put me on my legs again—and 'twas my own thought too."

"That was very clever," says Hugo.

"Nay, nay; but people oft' call themselves wise when they are only lucky."

Then they could not pass the door of merchant Gedd without stopping and being stopped. They received blessings and congratulations, fair prophecies and kind warnings from the merchant and his wife. "And have I made such an impression on the lady as that she should take a glass of milk?" said that fair and modest matron, who forthwith ordered out the newest produce of her dairy in her oldest *reel chaney* for Miss Drake, who had begun to look charming

again, she could row and declare, goodness gracious 'bo praised!

At last this triumphal progress ended in the far spreading sands; a world with a single inhabitant, the friend they sought—Miss Teague.

"Oh, I am so glad. How good it is to be glad. Dear Letty, will you sit by me, or go down the sands on the pony?"

"I will walk. I can walk, I am sure. Can anything be done with the pony; and will any one walk with me?"

The pony was soon tied up at the door of a fish-cellar not far off—a building where pilchards were salted, pressed, and packed; and Letty enjoying her newly-retained strength, wandered away with Hugo by her side. Alice sat down on a rocky seat and began to talk to Miss Teague.

"How many things seemed to have happened lately! How strange it is that we should have Letty trusted to our keeping!" she said. "Once, and for a long time, there was the greatest difficulty in getting her here even for a few hours. She seemed to shrink from coming to Coombe, and Lady Judith always discouraged it. But I know what makes the difference."

"What?"

"Look at them," said Alice. "But I do not think Letty knows what she is doing. He does, because Uncle Peter spoke of it plainly."

"Whatever happens it will be *your* doing," said Miss Teague. "I doubt about your ever having loved him as a woman had best love her husband, though."

"Ah," said Alice, "our lives are like the ventures of those fishermen with their nets and lines in the sea. We don't know what we may catch. A man may fish for a sturgeon, and he catches a sole. Well, he may never catch the sturgeon—would it not be a pity to cast away the sole? He really wished sincerely to catch something. It will naturally end in his accepting what he can get. Besides, it is a nice sole, a very nice one; and it is his own, just for the taking—would it not be silly to throw it away?"

"Oh! And you—what will be found in your net?"

"It is still in the sea. We women prepare our baits and make and mend our nets, and like to prolong our uncertainties, I believe. But we do not know what we may catch, or what mischief we may be making when we are doing our duty blindly, with an innocent desire of being universally agreeable."

"Here they come," said Miss Teague, looking towards Letty and Hugo, and seeing that they had turned round and were walking towards them. "Let us go and meet them."

It was quite clear to Miss Teague, and, indeed, to Alice also, when she went through the needless pain of self-examination, that she could not separate herself from Hugo's life. She was perpetually referring to him in her memory and her heart. She could not bear not to have her way about him. It had been a great trial not to speak to him when she had made up her mind to speak. It was suffering to have him go and come and never consult or consider her. To feel she had lost her rights in him was pain; and yet, what had her rights been? It was a question very hard to answer, but she had certainly always had a property in Hugo, and to have lost it was to feel bankrupt in affection. In spite of every blessing, she knew she was lonely, because she had passed out of Hugo's life.

She had tried to discipline herself. She really had rejoiced that night, up among the pines by her father's side, because of the new sense of independence, and the feeling of womanhood and freedom that had come upon her; but now she knew that the first independent act of the freedom of her woman's life would have been to bring back Hugo if she could. But he had got out of her reach so noiselessly, so entirely—his conduct was so faultless, so natural, so perfectly adapted to the change which she had herself made in his circumstances, that she felt powerless—there was nothing to say and nothing to do. But she had found herself out—she loved Hugo.

Even in her hopelessness she was glad. It seemed even to herself to be a strange feeling. But she said it to herself again and again, "*I am glad*. It is a gladness to know that I love a good man—a man who loved me. If he should ever come to me again, I will tell him how I found myself out, and humble myself, and thank him for seeking the woman who was so arrogant as not to know herself, so ignorant as not to know him. I will not hide the truth from myself any more," mused Alice; "I would rather be his wife than anything else in the world, and I do not deserve him."

So they walked to meet Letty on the sands.

That very evening Hugo was in Miss Teague's garden, and she was saying, "Ah! my dear boy, my dear Hugo, I do not know whether I like your loitering about in this little world of ours or not. Do you ever think of Alice?"

"Yes; often."

"Well?"

"I think she would marry me if I asked her again."

"Oh, Hugo!"

"I *do* think so; and I mean no harm."

"Well; and why not ask her?"

"I won't," said Hugo, like a schoolboy, as it was still his pleasure to be with this wise and tender friend. She quite shrunk away.

"What is the use of shattering her peace? She is contented. She is never going to be other than she is. She has not found out that the world goes round, or that time never stands still, or that if she lives she will be wrinkled, and-broken-backed, perhaps. She believes in the present—nothing else. She is asleep, and hushed in a beautiful dream."

All this was dropped out, as if for his own particular amusement, between puffs of tobacco smoke.

"But think of yourself, Hugo."

"I assure you I have thought myself into a state of perfection. I am as full of good sense as the pence-table. Now, where would be the sense of risking my life——" Miss Teague stared—"the very life of my life—which a man's love is, or ought to be—you understand?" said Hugo, smoking most impressively.

Miss Teague bowed her head.

"I should be accepted, because she finds it a very humiliating bore to do without me. I don't want that."

"What is best to be done, I wonder! I know, Hugo, that a woman who is worth having is worth working for. Work and win."

"I am quite up to the work," gravely replied Hugo; "but I intend to be quite sure of the value of that which I might win."

"It is sad to see a thing go so wrong. What is best?"

"A season in London, I should say."

"Oh, Hugo! And she so charming—handsome—rich!"

"Exactly so. I could stand by and watch the testing process, with profoundest interest. She told me she would not break her heart if I married Letty. By the powers, I'm her equal!"

Then he threw the end of his cigar away, and said loving words to Miss Teague—loving, grateful words, such as it was a pleasure to say, and then he went away.

"I was mistaken," said Miss Teague; "he is very fond of her."



CHAPTER XXVIII.

DAYS AND NIGHTS.

Time, that aged nurse,
Rocked me to patience.—KEATS.

IF it was good for Letty to lead the life, and to go on contemplating the life so new to her, which was the habitual life at Coombe, it was certainly good for Alice to have her there, and to grow to love her, as she did, more and more.

Through the days and nights that had now passed since the morning when Alice sent Hugo away from her, she had gone through many trials of feeling, and she had arrived at the state best described as the life of patience. It was not waiting, for she believed that she had lost the good which she had learnt too late to recognise; it was not despair, for Hugo lived, and was near her, and unmarried; but it was in no sense a life of hope; it was simply a time of patience, and of silence too; she talked to no one of herself.

Talking, she knew instinctively, could not, at this period of her life, be of the smallest benefit.

From the hour when her father had talked to her in the pine-grove, he had felt that everything was then settled and fixed for all future time. That was his way. He wished, hoped, worked, and persevered; but when the knowledge came to him that the thing he desired was not to be had, then he gave it up with as perfect a strength, and as absolute a sincerity as had blessed his hope. He never changed his mind, because he never gave in till it was made clear to him that further perseverance would be cruel or absurd. He had wished most unwaveringly for the marriage of Hugo and Alice. But when she refused him, he took his hat off to the

lady, recognised the power of her sovereign will, confessed his disappointment, but nevertheless upheld her in the exercise of her right of choice. He was a little, just a very little, amused perhaps to see how easy it appeared to be for Hugo to return to the old life with the hope put out of it; but this afforded only a passing entertainment. He once said to his wife with a smile that their relations to each other had been always out of common experience.

"Yes," Mrs. Penwarne had answered, looking in the fulness of her beauty, into her husband's magnificent face—"Yes, Arthur; but it has changed Alice."

"Not to her hurt,"

"She has grown old."

"Rather, she has felt the full measure of her years. That is all, that is truth. It is all quite right."

"She is not ready to fall in love with any one else. It has been a sort of wrench, I think."

"Perhaps. But let us wait for the love till we see the lover."

Then they walked off as their custom was to enjoy life by themselves; and Alice saw them among the trees, talking, stopping to smile and sun themselves in some opening brightness, and moving off gently again into the solitary shade. "I am older than they are," said Alice in her heart.

And it was this sight, and this consciousness, renewed daily, that made Alice know that she had burthened herself with one of those trials, the load of which no other heart could share.

Also, Alice was a sincere character. She had learnt a very severe piece of self-knowledge, and she had convicted herself of having been in the wrong. She knew that she had never realized the fact of the loss of Hugo out of her life, but for the gratification of her self-love she had risked it—the consequence had been loss, and the pain of loss. It did not belong to her character to cry out, and explain, and let even her nearest friends see that with self-knowledge had come repentance. It was demanded of her by her natural strength that she should suffer silently, and keep the results of her hard-won wisdom to herself. *When she should succeed*—if she ever succeeded—she would say to the whole world if needful, that she had repented from the first; but, until then—patience.

She puzzled Miss Teague, and she puzzled her mother. She was so calmly happy, apparently. She neither shrunk

from Hugo's presence, nor enjoyed his absence. He lived on at Coombe during a time of lovely weather; going about with Letty and Alice; riding, walking, driving; full of interest in the great fishing season now at its height, and even sometimes out in the boats at night when the fish were being taken, with little Joe under his charge, whom he regularly returned to his waiting mother, going round by Mrs. Ferris's farm to see him safe, and get the blessing that lived for him on the dying woman's lips.

London was hot, he said; and he had nothing to do there. Perhaps he would go up again for a last bit. Was not Lady Dynham going to give a ball at Dynely? She always did a thing of that sort every year. He had gone to it always, when in England; and he was engaged to dance with Sophy Ceresseau. But for the present he was contented with the life before him; and he liked straw hats and light strange-coloured coats. A flood of such like excellent reasons kept Hugo Penwarne at Coombe; and he was so busy all day long that no one had any grounds for disapproval, and yet, also to him, life in the present was a life of patience.

And Alice liked him to stay. She was glad to have him before her. He filled up her life, and added richness to it.

To Letty, however, especially, had come the gift of patience. She considered herself well now. She had always been of a still, calm nature; but now, after the sudden night that had fallen on her she had waked up to life, and to the world—but it was a world without a future.

The first idea of this being the case was a little appalling. But she soon discovered that it was not a bad thing when reduced to practice.

It means that our present becomes our good; that which we accept, and make lovely, and for which we give praise. But we who look on upon the lives of the young know that it does not do for this to come too soon. We know that growing youth requires the food of hope, and its asking eyes the future. To be content with *to-day*, and to feel that the work that comes under our hands from sunrise to sunset is enough, generally belongs to a period of life reckoning many more years than Letty's.

Through nights and days Letty used to think things through and get accustomed to the sight of many truths. No doubt it was a bad thing to have that taken out of her life which had been to her the beautiful.

First of all with returning strength there would come something very like hope. She could scarcely believe in the things that had happened. Not a word said or written to her, not a thing done that she could dwell upon and argue with—only all dissolved and departed, as if the only real happiness in all her life had been a dream. Was it true?

Such a question as this, coming against her will, worried her at first; but one day a carriage full of people arrived from Marsland, and Mrs. Carteray came and talked to her.

It was a happy party, with old Sir Harry full of spirits and loud joy—almost the day was fixed for his beloved boy Freddy's return.

"If that bad fellow, Cecil, were not keeping him he would be here now. He writes that they come back together, but part at Dover—that fellow—that Cecil refuses to come here. He is going—now you shall guess three guesses. Where is he going, young ladies?"

"Oh, please to tell it at once. It is too provoking," said Mrs. Carteray. "He is going to America. He actually asks me to go to Liverpool to see him off."

"And she will go!" exclaimed Sir Harry, impetuously. "The most forgiving woman in existence—unless she is moved by curiosity. He had the world in a string—in a string, had Cecil; and he cuts the cord and drifts out into idleness."

"He talks of the freshness and vigour of things out there," said Mrs. Carteray, despairingly.

"Oh, rubbish!" cried Sir Harry. And then it seemed to Letty as if the turf she was gazing at was slowly moving away and taking the window-seat with it. So she held down her head and shut her eyes; she folded her hands in her lap, and said to her shivering heart—"No, hush, be still. My business is to get well." Patience conquered, and Hope lay dead.

They heard of his arrival in England, and of Mrs. Carteray making the journey to Liverpool to say farewell. And Captain Goodman—the beloved boy Freddy—came to Marsland, and to his good old father's side, and amidst the general rejoicing the loss of Cecil was scarcely felt. Mr. and Mrs. Baynard, however, spoke of what they called "Cecil's shameful freak" very angrily.

"You know he has had everything always in his favour

from the first, and it is too bad of him to throw life away—it is unprincipled. There is a sort of licentiousness in it. No, a man has no right to live so entirely for himself," remonstrated Mrs. Baynard. "I can understand a man leading an idle life—let such a man take his choice; but any one who acts as Cecil acts does an injury to his neighbours. He walks in and takes a good place, and so keeps another man out, and then flings away his advantages. It's wanton. And there certainly always was something very wanton about Cecil, most fascinating as he always was. And I am vexed at the bad return he has made to my sister, who has been an excellent mother to him. He actually showed *no* feeling—said he should probably *never* come back——" and then pretty Mrs. Baynard broke down and shed tears plentifully. In vain did her scarcely less vexed husband try to pacify her. She said:

"No, no, dear Eustace. I dare say I am silly, but I can't help it; and it is one of those things that must wear itself out. His footsteps are out of our lives, as dear Miss Teague would say. It is just the same, practically, as if he were dead, without our having the satisfaction of burying him. He has been so perfectly *one of us*; and we have all lived together in this dear, charming old-fashioned, comfortable way, our lives mingling, all our actions known, and our motives, and feelings, and our long-united histories so perfectly understood. It is cruel of Cecil to be so very selfish. And then we have been so deceived in him. He can't have any heart. He has just turned out one of those unbelieving creatures who have no faith in any one, nor any idea of friendship. I was never so vexed in my life."

But neither tears nor prayers were of any use. Cecil proved to be morally deaf and blind—even cold, hard, and utterly unable to comprehend other people's feelings. He only replied, "But I want to go. And who cares? What good am I to any of you? It would have been just the smallest scrap hard to go if Freddy had not come back. Sir Harry likes to have a man in the house. But Freddy comes, and I go. It is a matter of course. And as to my profession, really I don't care for success. I would rather be a backwoodsman. I dare say I shall be one."

But one morning Hugo Penwarne rose early, and went to Colonel Penwarne's room.

"Should you think me mad if I went off to say good-bye to Cecil Carteray?"

"No. Go, of course, if you wish it."

When the girls came down to breakfast Hugo was gone.

That day was a strange day to Letty. "I am glad," she said to herself. "It is just the last chance that justice seems to ask for."

The day and the night and the next day passed. Then Hugo came back.

"Did you see him?" asked many voices.

"Just for ten minutes. I went out to the ship in a boat—a splendid vessel! I brought back Mrs. Carteray. She stayed to the last moment, and was very sorry to part with him. He is uncommonly changed," said Hugo, in answer to a question from Mrs. Penwarne. "He looks very ill; and I expect illness is at the bottom of it. He said, in fact, that he really was not well, and that the only thing for him was a new world and a new life. The sight of his pale thin face did much to reconcile Mrs. Carteray to the parting; but it was a terrible pang, I could see, and I am very glad I went. I knew him in the old time, when I was here in my holidays, you remember. He was the best big boy I ever saw. We have always had the strongest friendship."

"And he is really gone?"

"Gone. I do not think he will ever come back," said Hugo. "Have you seen Fred?"

Then there was plenty of talk about Captain Goodman. "He is going back to London directly. It is a short visit, just to see his father. He is going to sell out," said Colonel Penwarne.

On this some military talk followed, and Letty stole away out to the shelter of the peaceful trees. There is a pain in patience sometimes, and she was suffering it. Years, she knew, would mellow the pain, as years will mellow bitter draughts.

"When I am old," she reflected, "I may even like to think about it." And then she smiled amidst the soft silence, remembering that if any one was to write Cecil's life, the best and purest part could never be told; the love—the love in its first sincerity, in its early truth—all of that would be lost in an absolute silence.

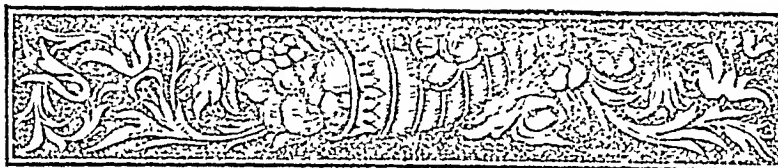
There is an intensity in youth which belongs to no other time, and in the word "youth" the state of childhood must be included. Did the woman ever suffer an agony of despair greater than that experienced by the child when she broke the face in a long ghastly scar of the first wax doll? Of

course childhood ought to be like a succession of picture-books without any "reading" in them; but if a page is turned, and words are read with their meanings made plain in the most comprehensive manner, then the sooner Patience is found, understood, and accepted, the better. Letty had now suffered, in the silence of a great intensity, surprise, disappointment, desertion, despair. "Time, that aged nurse," had come to her in her trouble, and at last "rocked her to patience." Cecil had had one last chance given to him for explanation in Hugo's visit, and he had not taken it. It was all over now. Long-summer nights came with a delicious peace, and when others were asleep, Letty would be gazing from a sofa brought near to the open window on the outside world. It hushed her, and did her good. She scarcely thought—she gave way to no fancies. She had had sleepless nights, and she had found that imagination is a terrible tyrant. She stayed there gazing on the great calm till she was calm herself, and could steal softly back to the French bed in the corner, and lie down with a prayerful heart, and a brain willing to sleep. This was the one relaxation she enjoyed, and allowed herself. This communing with nature did her good. Then there was the calm, still, shadowy sea, which only reflected the heaven above, and obeyed no voice but its Maker's; it was pleasant to her eyes as it showed in a great bright plain between the trees, and passed away into infinite space. She felt the rest that it is after an illness to look out afar, and afar, as so many others have felt. And a new light got into Letty's eyes—a pure, rich, golden light, a sort of glory, because she knew from experience how much love, unsuspected, lives in the world; how much suffering, borne silently; how much sacrifice; how many victories; and what strength and patience from the Giver of all good!

In a short time people began to say how well Miss Drake appeared to be, that she seemed all the better for her illness, and that it was a pleasure to look at her again.

She left off lying alone with the starlight, and took again to the common things of common life.

"Ah, and she looks purely," said Mrs. Ferris. "They have got a gift of healing among them up at Coombe."



CHAPTER XXIX.

OTHER PEOPLE.

Youth, who, fierce, fickle, insolent, and vain,
Impatient urges on to manhood's reign;
Impatient urges on, yet, with a cast
Of dear regard, looks back on childhood past.

CHURCHILL.

FREDDY GOODMAN was a tall, bright-faced, fair-haired man; very much such a person as the curly-haired child who had so often been taught that "manners maketh man," on Mrs. Penwarne's lap, when she was the "Miss Jane" of Frederrick, was likely to have become, in a proper number of years. He was a happy-hearted man, who seemed but to have one grief in the world, of which he made no secret, though it was uttered in rather ambiguous words—"he was terribly put out about Liza." He submitted to catechising with a not unwilling ear, and, indeed, with a very winning grace. "The fact was," he said, "I could not make love to a girl of fourteen—or I thought so; but I wish I had—and now she is twenty-one, and going to marry that great, rich, lucky, stiff old stick, Luxton."

His woe was received at Coombe with peals of laughter from the gentlemen, and with various expressions of amused surprise by the ladies.

"I always intended to live at Lerrins," says Freddy, in an injured tone. "My father always intended it. It was natural. The mother was my father's ward. She married before I was out of petticoats. I suppose Mrs. Penwarne can tell, and if she can't there is Miss Teague to refer to, who knows everything; and seven years ago I was very fond of the child Liza, and of course it would only have been

decent to wait for my return. To keep it a profound secret too. It would not have been told even now, if Lady Mary, in the most annoying way, had not taken me aside—and, ‘dear Freddy,’ she says, ‘I think you ought to know our little secret. Your little friend is engaged to Mr. Luxton, our neighbour in Yorkshire. Estates join, very ancient family, going to be his uncle’s heir; sad deaths of those fine young men—quite unexpected to Mr. Luxton, but making a considerable change in his position. He proposed for Mary immediately. But propriety demanded the passage of a certain time before announcement. The dear girl was very young—so dutiful—*such* a comfort. But now Sir James Luxton, the uncle, is to be told directly, and perhaps it is right—*right!*’ Now I only wish you could have seen her eyes, and heard her voice when she repeated that word. I can’t bear Lady Mary, and never could bear her—though I believed in her too, before I went away, when Liza and I were together, and her mother said just the same thing. Terrins and Marsland estates joined then, and she would look all manner of things into my eyes and say so. And I do declare that I meant it,” said Freddy, with touching gravity. “And I have no idea of people playing fast and loose. It brought the tears into my father’s eyes when he heard of Liza’s engagement. ‘That is what serving your country has done for you, my boy,’ he said. ‘If you had never left home you might have married Liza a year ago!’”

“But what would the young lady herself have said to you?” inquired Colonel Penwarne.

“That is a question,” said Freddy, “of too delicate a nature to be discussed in mixed society. However, I think that I might not have been found to have hoped in vain. In fact, I feel not only for myself but for the lady.”

The absurdity of Captain Goodman’s talk on this matter, and the overflowing of that drollery which it was in that gentleman’s nature to be always supplying, made the whole luncheon-party give up eating for laughter more than once.

Love affairs would not naturally have been a subject particularly amusing to the two girls, Letty and Alice, or to Hugo either, at that moment; but Freddy Goodman’s love and constancy, his hopes and his disappointments, as declared by himself, were questions which he contrived to

make remarkably funny; the young people laughed aloud, and Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne were scarcely behind them in merriment.

This reception of his griefs had no other effect on Freddy than to make him still more communicative. The tenderest possible expression of sympathy could not have received a better welcome.

"And I really am *very* sorry for Liza," said Freddy impressively, and helping himself to another piece of chicken pie; "poor, pretty little child; the brightest plaything that ever was. I have never lost the memory of her ringing laugh, and I could always recall the expression of her soft welcoming eyes. It is the greatest shame—poor Liza!"

"If she is satisfied, as of course she is, as she belongs to the class of the favoured few who may pick and choose, I should say you have no right to pity her."

"Nonsense, Hugo! The man's a stick, and fifteen years older at least than she is."

"That is not a fault, Freddy, said Mrs. Penwarne, with her beautiful face all alight with happy triumph. "Boy, I shall have to chastise you," said the Colonel.

"What a fuss! laughed Freddy. "As if *you* were a stick. Look at Mrs. Penwarne. I see no traces on her face of any previous attachment;" and he sighed, with his hand on his heart. Then, in the midst of the general laughter that was going on at his expense, Freddy said, "and I'll have Liza now, if I can!"

There was no echo of merriment to that speech. Everybody felt that he was in earnest, and Colonel Penwarne said, "No, no, Freddy, don't play a dangerous game. You can't marry the girl, and you *may* make her miserable. I know something of Luxton. A dull man, but a deep one. If he were angry he would not either fight it off, or laugh it off,—or live it down either. He would make people suffer. Men can't quite unmake their dispositions, you know. Don't, even in joke, play with fire."

"Very well, sir," said Freddy, quite seriously, "then I won't be in joke."

They got up from this luncheon table with more gravity than they had expected. While they were still standing in the room Freddy said, "You shall never think evil of me if I can help it, Colonel Penwarne. But I have written to Liza, written to Lady Mary, sent both of them presents, and Lady Mary once *wished* me to marry Liza. I know she did

—but what is more to the purpose, *she* knows she did; and she knows that when she imparted to me her discovery that Lerrins and Marsland joined, she meant me to understand her thoughts. I have been thinking it all over very quietly, and I am going to London to tell her so."

"Don't. It will do no good."

"I am not sure of that."

"It would not give you the girl's affections. What else—what *less* than that is worth having?"

"Most true," said Hugo.

Alice looked at Hugo, but his eyes were intent on a picture hanging on the wall.

"I think," said Freddy, "that Liza never knew of my return. I was not to have come back so soon. She does not now know of my selling out. That I do because my father cannot now get on without either Cecil—bother that boy—or myself. He's been the ruin of me—Cecil has. The most unscrupulous creature. I wish we did not all love the fellow. I lose my profession—am I to lose my lady-love too? Not if I can help it. I declare she shall have her choice."

"Take care!"

"Oh, I'll take care," answered Freddy; "I shall go up to town and impart my woes to Lady Judith; she was always kind to me."

"My mother!" exclaimed Letty, involuntarily showing her surprise.

"Even so," with a bow. "Have you any commands? I have not settled when to go. But I shall be gone in five minutes after making up my mind."

So Captain Goodman went his way home to Marsland, and stopped, before reaching the paternal mansion, to look at the meadows, and the spreading great Spanish chestnut trees, and recall the girl whom he really had faithfully loved from his boyhood, and whom he thought her mother was safely keeping for him.

Plenty of pleasant messages he had sent to Liza through that mother—had she ever had them? Had he been made a fool of?

These were terrible questions. He would go home and read Lady Mary's letters. He had felt too utterly confused in his five minutes' interview with that lady in London on his way home, to collect his thoughts and arrange his memories. He would now get together his evidence, make

out his case, and go to London, and "have it out" with his mother. "For men are very badly used," he muttered, "very often. Taken up—cast aside—changed for a little more money, or a stupid title—why, Sir James won his at the point of the bayonet—what good will that do his nephew? And I—I shall be Sir Frederick if I live. I'm as good as he; and he's a *regular stick*—" which form of expression applied to Mr. Luxton, the former lover of Sophy Ceresau, was a great comfort apparently to the grieving, angry, apostrophizing Freddy. It was a mercy that he had not been of the number of Lady Dynham's confidants. Poor Sophy's secret would have had small chance of being kept, it is to be feared.

Then Freddy entered the presence of his delighted father.

Certainly this man had brought light, sunshine, and healthy atmosphere to the old man's age. Everybody delighted in him, for Freddy—without being in any sense light-minded, had the glorious gift of light-heartedness.

This youth's stream of time bubbled away with dashings that were full of music and laughter; his psalm was a song of mirth with a chorus of thanksgiving; and he had come happily at this moment on the little world with which our story lies.

Our friends were getting too full of self-contemplation. They were in danger of being too much occupied by their own lives. And, as things too much dwelt on, lose their true proportions, so they were in danger of accepting exaggerated views of their future, as the accurate pictures of what life contained for them. On this, Freddy Goodman rushed in, as a healthy disturbing influence, and he did every body good.

There was a sort of fascination about Freddy. Everybody liked him. He was a power in everybody's life. He had an all-conquering way with him, and he would be attended to. His old father said that Freddy was always in the right place. He was never in the wrong. He was always bringing in fresh streams of outer air from the life into which the old sportsman was now too "used up," to go much more. He almost ceased to feel his privations now that Freddy was at home.

Cecil Carteray was being forgotten.

That was the unspoken, but the most remarkable of the facts accompanying the presence of Freddy Goodman at

Marland. Mrs. Carteray felt with a sigh, and said it was all for the best. Mrs. Baynard announced it, not in words, but, with a tear in her pretty eyes, by a tone of triumph in her voice.

"It was delightful to see so much happiness about her father in his old age," she said; but those who heard her knew what she meant. "And Freddy was not the least capricious," she added one day when Letty was by, who shivered, though the whole landscape lay in the sun, and in such a way as to make Mrs. Baynard ask if anything was the matter?

Still the new comer was every one's point of interest. Still he came almost daily to Coombe because it was of no use to go to London, as Lady Mary and Mr. Cleverleigh had gone to Yorkshire for a fortnight—but they were coming back, and that Dynely ball was to come off, and still Freddy told his troubles out loud, and pitied Liza, and exhibited himself as the model of an ill-used man.

He came, as Miss Teague said, trampling into their lives, and stamping out everybody's footsteps till there were none left but his own. And nobody blamed, but, on the contrary, everybody praised him. He was so good, pleasant, clever, accomplished, light-hearted, and the best fun in the world.

"He'll have his own way, or make that girl miserable," said Miss Teague.

"Or make Mr. Luxton miserable," suggested Hugo, to whom she had been speaking. "How much do you know of Miss Cloverleigh? I have not seen her since we once went nutting together, and she tore her blue frock, and appeared to be quite satisfied with the mischief she had done."

"I only just know her. They never lived at Terrins. Once or twice they happened to be there in your and Alice's holidays. Lady Mary was a selfish child—but that is a hundred years ago."

"Quite," said Hugo, laughing. "Before I knew this world of Trederrick and Coombe—when I had a black nurse, perhaps, if ever I had one. Before I know the pleasures of life—or its pain."

"Are you going to town again?"

"Oh! yes; I think I'll go when Freddy goes. If Mr. Luxton calls him out, I can be his friend, you know."

"I wish the Lord Chancellor made all the marriages."

"So do I. I should have had Alice for my wife a year ago."

"Oh! Hugo! Hugo!"

"Good-bye. I've got to be back by luncheon. Fred will be there."

And at Coombe he found the expected hero, gaily declaring the endurance of his misery, and parenthetically lamenting its protraction between bursts of sparkling drolleries, and ridiculous talk about little nonsensical nothings. But always in his moments of gravity he returned to his determination to go to town as soon as Lady Mary and Mr. Cleverleigh came back, and open his heart to Lady Judith.

"Do you remember my aunt?" asked Alice. "It is seven years since you saw her."

"Not quite, Miss Penwarne—over six years. It is for my interest to reduce the period to the smallest possible point; and I have an accurate remembrance of Lady Judith, of whose character I had made a study from about six years old, I should say. The only person I should not have known is Miss Drake. I left a thin, tall, huge-eyed, slightly-staring, exceedingly silent, objectionably-inquiring child; I find—well, you see—not that, certainly. But Lady Judith liked me; she pronounced me to be the least troublesome child she had ever known. I heard her say it. Has any one ever calculated the power of praise? That declaration of hers, uttered in my hearing, made me a good boy ever after. Don't laugh. I never forgot it. I always acted up to my character. I shall go to her with my heart in my hand; and she will help me."

"What, help you about Liza, my mother?"

Letty looked appalled.

"Why not? Is there anything the matter with her?"

"The matter?—what should be the matter?"

"Well, anything to disqualify her for being a *confidante*—deafness, for instance."

"She isn't deaf," said Letty, laughing, against her will, at the seriousness of Freddy's manner—a seriousness which was irresistibly comic.

"My mother is quite young still——"

"What is the matter, then? Has she to be approached by any unusual formalities? I could, if needful, propitiate her by the presentation of a tiger skin."

"I am sure she would like it above all things," said Letty, laughing now very willingly. "My mother's house in London is delightfully odd, and quite unlike any other house that ever

was seen. I advise you to judge for yourself as to its fitness. But my mother will not let you talk about Liza. I know she won't."

"I will try, however; and I am going the day after to-morrow."

"I will go too," said Hugo. "I have some matters of business to bring to a conclusion—I suppose you won't change your mind?"

"I will walk over to-morrow and tell you," replied the Captain; and so said, "Good-bye."

It had become his habit to walk or ride from Marsland to Coombe nearly every day, and he was doing by this a great work, as many a great work is done, unexpectedly and unconsciously, on the part of the doer—he was taking people out of themselves, as it is called; saving Letty and Alice from the great danger of being their own heroines, wrapped up in the study and contemplation of their own lives.

When Alice heard that Hugo would go away again, she wondered for a moment as to why he went. What affairs had he to transact? Why did she not know his affairs as she had once known everything that interested or concerned him? His going would leave her life a blank. Estranged as they were, his mere presence was a happiness; and sometimes a tone of voice, a light word, would make her feel that the old days would come back again; but these thoughts were short-lived. She felt within an hour of their birth, that they had nothing to live upon, and that they must die.

And then she would wonder over what he might be feeling about Letty. His manner to her was always the same; kind, gentle, full of interest and tender service; there was not anything to be learnt from it, and Letty was as easy in his company as if he had been her brother. "I wonder if anything will ever happen in this world again!" sighed Alice.

But many things were happening, although to one heart—made impatient by the weariness that at times was like a dead weight which neither youth nor wisdom could reduce by one feather of its heaviness, the whole of life seemed to be at a standstill. Yes, time was flying fast, and many things were happening; among them, Lady Dynham's ball at Dynely, or rather the necessary preparations for that promised event, and the first news of the active progress of

affairs was brought to Coombe by Captain Goodman. In he came with his bright face, and easy manner; with his pleasant gentleness, his flattering belief in everybody there, and his gay but real earnestness in any matter—whatever it was—that could be called the matter in hand.

"I have had a note from Belton," he said.

"Do you know him?"

"Of course I do. In London, *en route* home, two men came into the club—one called the other by his name, and that other was speaking of Trederrick; so I said I had never had Trederrick out of my memory for twenty-four hours at a time since I was four years old. We made friends. Of course we knew each other directly. He dined with me the next day before travelling down through the night. I gave him some prime cigars. This ball comes off very soon, and I am going to it. Liza will be there, of course."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Penwarne.

"I wish you two were going," said Freddy, standing by the table where Letty and Alice were working.

"Oh, no!" they gasped, both speaking together.

"I ought not to suffer any vexation, or be contradicted on any subject so soon after coming home."

"But I am not sure that we have been asked," said, Alice.

"Oh, let us see. Here are letters."

And it really happened that a letter came from Lady Dynham, entreating for every one's presence at Dynely.

Lady Dynham wrote quite freely. "I was not sure about giving it," she said, "but now it must be in September; I have wanted to catch the Cleverleigh party. They have been in Yorkshire."

"I hope you are all listening," said Mrs. Penwarne as she read the letter aloud. "I waited to know about that."

"Please to go on," said Freddy. Mrs. Penwarne obeyed.

"There are reasons which make it desirable to have *them*, and Mr. Luxton, and Sir James too, if we can get him. There are reasons, as I have said, so I waited. But they are all to come back to town, I suppose, about Liza's wedding clothes."

"I have no objection to wedding clothes," said Freddy; "what next?"

"I hope you will all come. It can't be any *very* great effort I should think to any of you. At any rate, try to make it for *me*."

So the letter ended. And on it followed a great discussion.

"We ought to go," said Colonel Penwarne.

"Oh, my love!" in a pathetic voice, from his wife.

"It is too hot," said Alice.

"We danced in India," said Hugo.

"It will be impossible for a shy fellow like him to go by himself," sighed Freddy. "It will be a tremendous gathering."

"Send me to Miss Teague," said Letty, "and then come back and tell me all about it."

And in that manner it was arranged. They were to go, and Miss Teague was not to have Letty, but to preside at Coombe while the others were away.

"Will you dance the first dance with me?" asked Captain Goodman.

"No," said Alice, "you will be wishing to dance with Liza."

"With me, then?" said Hugo, looking at her gravely.

"Why, you are engaged to Sophy Cereseau. I heard you ask her."

"So I am. Thank you," said Hugo.

How much hangs on a moment sometimes. A single flash of lightning will burn a house down. A single flash of lightning has revealed to a benighted traveller a danger in his way, which but for that friendly blaze would have brought him instant death. An electric spark had flashed out of those few words—"So I am—thank you;" and to Freddy Goodman a history was revealed—the presence of a grievous pain—the double weariness of two lost lives. He wanted no explanation. He never said a word to show the knowledge that had come to him. But the knowledge was there, and he was for a moment full of wondering distress.

Alice grew paler because Hugo never spoke again. One instant of silence filled the room with a sort of chill. Freddy looked at Colonel Penwarne, but he was absorbed in the just-arrived newspaper. He looked at Mrs. Penwarne, but she was deep in another letter—then at Letty—she had laid her work aside and was looking, far away, beyond the trees, across the blue ocean, into the horizon which bounded all human sight, and left her with the hunger in her eyes.

Alice worked away silently, with busy hands on some mysterious fabrication—"I wonder why you are uncivil," said Freddy, looking at her.

"I—I, uncivil? I never was; I never could be to any one here."

"Then engage yourself for the first dance to me."

"Oh, yes; if you please. And yet, if Liza should——" she looked up with her smiles come back again.

"Never mind. You would not quarrel with me if I asked to be let off."

"Ah, how do you know?"

"Don't you value honesty? Is there any one in the world who could value honesty more than you could?"

"That is true," said Alice. "Honesty must win in the end."

"And are you going to take me for the second; after my duty with Miss Cereseau is done?"

"If you please."

Hugo was by her side; her clever hands worked faster. They both felt that some good had been done, or some harm prevented; but Hugo's face was very grave, and Letty was, half sad, half sleepy, still looking on the world outside. Freddy laughed. "What can you three be thinking of?"

"I am going to enjoy this coming bit of life at second hand very much," said Letty, getting up from her seat, and collecting the contents of her workbox together.

"And I wonder whether my dress should be pink," said Alice.

"I think," said Hugo, softly, "that I am an honest man."

"Oh, Alice, come here," said Mrs. Penwarne. "You dressed in pink!—my dear, I want you to read this—no, of course not. You must have a white dress—white, of course—I will write to Madame Honoré immediately—Hugo, say that I shall want to send to Newton. And really," she went on, "I think we shall go to London for a week, before going to Dynely. I must consult with Colonel Penwarne; and I will write to Lady Judith about you, Letty, directly."

"My mother will quite approve of my being surrendered to Miss Teague," said the girl, gently.





CHAPTER XXX.

TALKING OF LIFE.

Two solemn owls together sat,
Conferring thus in solemn chat.—GAY.

"**S**O they are going to London." This was the greeting got by Miss Teague on her next visit to the Cot Farm, after the decision as to Lady Dynham's ball had been come to.

"Yes; and I am going to take care of Miss Drake at Coombe."

"She's coming on purely, seems to me," says Mrs. Ferris. "She's young. She's booked for getting better—not like Geraldine inside there. But do you know that Lady Judith has sent her a present?"

"Lady Judith! A present, indeed!"

"A present, I tell 'ee! and I take it kindly of her. And she never darkened my doors but once, and that was the day before she left Trederrick. You mind, you were in charge of Miss Letty. Well, come evening—yet the light was day's light, too—just before her dinner, I reckon; I looked up and there she stood, in the doorway, by herself. 'It is hot,' she said; and she took off the broad-brimmed hat she was wearing, and the western sun came down on her tawny hair, and she fairly looked crowned wi' gold. I rose up and made my reverence, and such a smile came upon her face! She's handsome. Did you ever hear tell if the Lononers ever thought her handsome? She had always seemed a hard-favoured woman before that moment; but then she showed in a new light, and I thought her beautiful in spite of her years. She's fifty, beain't she?"

"Yes, she is fifty," said Miss Teague. "What happened next?"

"Just this. I said, 'Step in, my lady; don't be putting the doorstep between us; if you don't step in, I must just step out.' Then she smiled again. 'Come!' she said, 'come out here. I am hot, for I have walked fast.' So she and I stood in the shadow of the wall. 'I would not go away without thanking you,' she said. 'You have sent many things to my daughter. Everything you sent did her good—did *me* good, too,' and there was a tear in her eye. 'Oh,' I said, 'sickness is a great one for bringing us to our level. A sick girl is a sick girl. But we all are of one human nature; and love,' says I, '"Love is a present for a mighty king.'" 'So you read George Herbert?' was her answer."

"Geraldine reads him, and I listen. I am not much for poetry," I said, 'unless there's a good bit of stout prose in it, just like that scrap of truth which I have made bold to quote to you.' 'Where's Geraldine?' she asked. So I said she was lower-side on her sofa, watching the sun go down, which is a great pleasure to her, and one she never tires of."

"May I see her?" she said. So I took her into Geraldine; and, to be sure, the poor thing was looking very angel-like—she so pale, the light so red, fairly tinting the blind she had pushed aside from the window; and Geraldine was saying a hymn out loud as we went in, and the two last lines my lady stood still and heard.

"How glorious must those mansions be
Where thy redeemed shall dwell with thee!"

"It is well for those who can find in earthly things the pictures of the heavenly ones," she said, offering Geraldine her hand. I never spoke. Geraldine looked surprised. 'I am Lady Judith,' she said, 'come to give you my poor thanks for rich gifts of kindness and sympathy to my daughter.' 'She is one of the pleasures of my life,' said Geraldine; 'and you too will be a pleasure in it, now I have seen you.' 'Shall I?'

"Now," said Mrs. Ferris with energy, "if I were to live to be as old as a patriarch, I should never forget that '*Shall I?*' It had got so much in it. That woman has had a burthen to bear. She has, and I tell you so. And if I were to see her as grand as the Queen of Sheba I should still know by the sound that came forth upon those words that she has had a hard burthen to bear, and I guess she has borne it alone, poor woman!"

"Well," said Miss Teague, with something of the un-

believing in her voice. "Well, our burthens have to be borne somehow; people say our backs are suited to our burthens, don't they?"

"Of course," said Mrs. Ferris firmly. "And it is believed throughout all Trederrick, and elsewhere in Christian countries; but it need not interfere with that part of our duty towards our neighbour which is made up of trying to suit the burthen to the back."

"I certainly think the sympathy shown for Trederrick troubles did everybody good. And what has Lady Judith sent to Geraldine?"

"A Selection," said Mrs. Ferris proudly. A selection from the best poets. A handsome book, bound in leather, and gilt, and inside writing—'*From Lady Judith, with Many Thanks.*' And why don't she say *From Lady Judith Drake*?" asked Mrs. Ferris with a puzzled air. "Are folks getting above using their husbands' names? It should be the part of an honest woman to be proud of her man's name, in my opinion."

"I don't know what she means," said Miss Teague. "Perhaps, as she is always called by her own name, she chose to write what is most familiar to you."

"I'm quite familiar with Drake," said Mrs. Ferris, leading the way to the orchard, which Miss Teague had come to visit, and in a voice which showed her to be by no means appeased by such an idea. "Drake belongs to Trederrick, like Penwarne to Coombe, there's no judgment nor justice in forgetting it."

Miss Teague wisely abstained from making any reply, and so all discussion ceased. The loaded fruit-trees were admired. The talk of cider, as to quantity and quality, grew to be learned and practical; for, as Mrs. Ferris said, her landlady was not likely to learn of anybody else, and it was well for her to know that there were more things than housekeeping and book learning in the world. "You see, you have been a good deal more between four walls than I have," she said, when her lesson was over.

Up in London the woman of whom Mrs. Ferris had been speaking was learning and repeating lessons of life also. Lady Judith Drake was not the same woman in her house in town that she appeared to be at Trederrick. Which character was the true one, who could tell? Probably in neither was she her natural self. Possibly she had become habitually untrue. At Trederrick she admired and scorned

her world; and filled her place in it with a hard, bitter, yet joking levity, which was very bad. In London, she was calmer, harder, more angry, and less scornful.

Her house in town was to her own taste, and free from all captivity to tradition and custom. Mr. Drake had his own room in it, filled of course with all that was to him the pleasure of life. They lived lives, if possible, even more separate than at Trederriek; for in London she often dined alone, never waiting for Mr. Drake, and leaving him at liberty to enjoy the freedom which made him like their long sojourns in town as much as she did. They never breakfasted together. He visited her in her room before he went out; and then, if she had any plans for the day she always told him what they were. She did this with scrupulous fidelity. And when Letty was with them she would say—"Letty wishes to go to such a place," or, "do such a thing," or, "I thought of taking Letty to see this or that." Then Mr. Drake would answer, "Oh, no," in a hurry; or, "Please don't," or it would be, "As you please," or, "Just as you think best;" and then that day's conference would be over; and he would go his own way, see his own friends, send her messages as to any one coming to dinner, or bring home stray men to lunch. Do what he would he always found Lady Judith in her place, beautifully dressed, calmly gracious, utterly indifferent, as far as he could find out, to every thing upon earth. It wore him a little when they were alone. It would have worn him very much if he had not had Letty to ride with him, talk with him, write for him, and generally to be slaved into the utter surrender of her own natural life, and the obliteration of all those hopes and aspirations which usually, by making up a girl's future, make by anticipation the pleasure of the present. As Letty was not now with him to be useful, and worshipping—for she gave him faithful worship, so as quite to justify her mother's observation—"if the girl did not love him, she could not survive such treatment"—as Letty was not now by Mr. Drake's side he led a club life, and was absent for longer times, dining away from home very often, and frequently only seeing Lady Judith at those seldom omitted little visits in her morning-room.

But it did not follow that Lady Judith had a lonely life in town. She had a large circle of London friends; people who, more or less, belonged to the old life, before her marriage, many of whom were men; some married, some

not married; but people with whom Mr. Drake could never have got on, who had only seen Trederrick when taking tours through "The West," as they called it, before returning to the South, for the winter, as if Brighton had gone to Algeria.

One morning Lady Judith was sitting in perfect tranquillity in a room which showed the perfection of a lady's bower. It was like Lady Judith, and not at all like London. There was not the smallest trace of an upholsterer about it. It might have come to perfection by magic, and been gifted with a *for ever* entirely its own, dependent on its owner's will, and superior to all earthly conditions of dust and danger, wear and tear, gas or sunshine; and sunshine came apparently as pure and bright as at Trederrick itself, with more work to do, and with a better return for its labour.

All manner of lovely things were lit up by the creeping light. Flowers of the greatest variety grew and blossomed—china, which was priceless—pictures, every one a gem. The softest draperies, the rarest lace, and everything in its place, with a certain subdued sort of beauty, which put all thought of senseless, obtrusive exhibition quite out of the question. Lady Judith was a refined woman at all points. Everything about her was always beautiful. Her husband never lost sight of this. He would have hated her had she not been thus womanly. As it was, he could not help admiring her, with an admiration that commanded respect; and, strange to say, her exquisitely arranged hair, her perfect dress, her tasteful ornaments, and her general faultless appearance, had often put a check upon his tongue, when angry words had been ready to express the undying vexation and antagonism that lived against her in his heart.

But then, there was another consequence—when Lady Judith in her exterior perfection spoke bitter words, how they stung—how they wounded!—with a thousand times more intensity than if they had been uttered by a slovenly creature whom no painstaking on the part of a maid of the most approved character could ever have made fit to be seen.

Lady Judith knew this. It must be said also that she had got to glory in it. She sat now in the stillness of her beautiful room, looking very handsome, very grave, very unfeeling. The door was opened, and Sir James Luxton was announced.

"Oh, how do you do?"

She rose and met him.

He was as handsome a man for his age as Colonel Penwarne; Lady Judith had known him long and very well, too well, perhaps, she would once have said. But she had no need to say so now. No living being, now that her parents were dead, knew Lady Judith, and all that her life had been, as well as this man who stood before her like a hero; and a hero he had been, in his country's cause, and in *her* cause; and neither the world nor the woman had been ungrateful to him.

"You look very well, Lady Judith."

"Oh, I am well. I am generally in good health."

"Your daughter has been an anxiety, I hear. I met Mr. Drake. He told me. He said I should find you if I came." He said this with a touch of what some people would call the old-fashioned politeness. She looked in his face, cold, hard, terribly handsome, and laughed low and scornfully. He took her hand, with a look of pain passing rapidly across his fine face.

"Will you sit here?" he said.

She sat down and looked again at him with the cruellest smile on her face that ever woman wore.

"Letty is beautiful, I hear," said Sir James. "My trouble—my lost boys—the thought of them drove me away. I did not see either of you last year."

"Seeing you has, for a long time, been one of the best pleasures of my life," said Lady Judith. "My pleasures are rare, you know. And Letty is very lovely."

"And she is a joy to you." He said this, asserting it, not as a question.

"It would be hard to find much joy in her father's child. Oh, James," she cried, in answer to his look of vexation, "don't be angry—you can't be surprised. I can't help it. You are the only living creature to whom I can speak. I have never forgiven Mr. Drake. I never can. I declare that as a Christian I believe that I never need."

"I can't dispute with you. You never in this matter saw any side but your own."

"Because there was no other to see. Was there?"

"Yes; but I can't pain you by talking of it."

"I think it would do me good. I declare I should like to hear his side stated. I should be the better for deserved upbraiding. I am really better, in the middle of my heart,

than I have been for many years. I believe in sympathy—I have actually seen love."

"What has happened?"

"All sorts of absurd things. But they had teaching in them, and I have learnt. But Mr. Drake had no right to marry me. I can never get over that fact."

"You were not so in love with him as to suffer from any knowledge of a previous attachment; and I know his conduct to you has been, and was from the first, that of a proud admiring husband."

"Husband!" she repeated, "Why, he had a wife alive."

"Judith!"

"Well," she said with a laugh.

"You know the truth as to that."

"Perfectly. As a youth he married a Prussian girl by the Prussian law; as a man he put her away; also according to the law of her nation——"

"Which our laws respect," said Sir James, sternly.

"Why, is there no God in heaven?" she asked angrily.

"He married me, having divorced himself for no cause which is, in this country, thought sufficient for a divorce. And he made me his wife without giving me any information as to this thing in his past life."

"He could not tell you."

"I suppose not," she said scornfully. "But I wish he had."

"He did you no injury."

"What!" she exclaimed, "don't you know that when my boy died the former marriage came to my knowledge, because I then found out that the estate would go to that first wife's son? Don't you know that the divorce did not make the children illegitimate? Don't you know that the entail existing as to that property would have given it all to that man, and branded me before all the world as—as—what I am," she said. "I thank God for one thing, that the man died. I went over; I saw the evidences; I confronted the mother; I stood by his grave; I gave God thanks; because I could keep secret the insult that had been put upon me; but was I going to forgive Mr. Drake?"

Sir James did not answer her in words; but there was something very merciful and very sympathizing in the manner in which he bent his head as one who heard and could understand her.

"I think we have been on better terms since that," she

said, "I believe that he feels himself to be a more honest man than he was before. I believe, too, that he is happier in consequence."

"I think you over-rate your grievance. I always did. He did not know of the entail; or he had heard of it and thought it had been got rid of."

"I believe he never thought of anything but his own interest, or of anybody but himself. His is a selfish nature, and through life it has given forth the natural fruit."

"It would be hard indeed if you had loved him as some love. But as you have often said, it was a marriage of convenience."

"It was on my part an honourable marriage, if it is a marriage at all, of which I have grave doubts," she said. "He wanted such a one as I am. I had been hardened, and I took him. I gave as much love as I got. I really admired him. He was—indeed he is—very handsome. A gentleman in his tastes, in his manner; and a popular man in a cold, conquering, heartless way which amused me; I believed that I was doing a respectable thing, and I did it. Yes, James, you know I had been hardened. You know I never began to be a tender wife, and never pined for tenderness from my husband. We never were loving to each other, but I was driven to fight for my independence. He was the most utterly self-worshipping creature I ever saw. He would have turned me into his servant, exhibited me as his captive, trodden me under foot; he would have done with me as he had done with others, if I had not conquered him at least sufficiently for my own peace. But when my son died, and the story of his death and his heirship got known, and that other woman's son put in his claim to be considered as the heir under the entail, then, when I knew the truth—even in the midst of my grief—we became friends. *He repented*. I must give him that praise. He behaved in a humane manner and comprehended my feeling as to the enormous insult he had put upon me. It has all been different since. A sort of armed peace has existed. And sometimes I feel as if I might one day be happier than I have yet been. But it was a great blessing never to have loved Mr. Drake with the holy love that women give sometimes. I was very thankful that my heart had suffered less than my pride. Yes—don't look frightened, James—I was very glad that a too careful mother had sent you away to India, and made me believe, till after my marriage, that you

were a trifle, who had taught me to admire you above all others, just to leave me for the rest of my life alone. I was glad to find you were a true man. But as Trederrick was my destiny, I was glad to have had my heart hardened beyond the possibility of being broken by Mr. Drake."

"Our lives went contrary—I know that. But see how it is. I loved and married, and had two sons. I stand here alone; and *you* have many interests, or might have—and above all others, Letty."

"Quite true," she said, calmly; and, indeed there had not been the smallest tone of sentiment in anything she had said to Sir James; "quite true. And if I could see her marry Hugo Penwarne—you know whom I mean?"

"Yes; perfectly well."

"If she would marry that man I would forgive a good deal——"

"Forgive?" he asked.

"I mean forgive this life, this world, this hollow, false human society, a good deal which it has made me suffer. I have given up Letty to her father. We know very little of each other, compared with other mothers, and other only children; but I could not help it. I could not quarrel about *her*. My self-assertions have been bad enough, no doubt, but they have been for personal freedom, without which I should have bruised my brains against the cage in which my soul was captive, and lost my senses perhaps."

"Lady Judith, you have no right to entertain the thoughts that irritate you. A man may do all that he is allowed to do. If the validity of your marriage was to-morrow brought before a competent court of inquiry, it would be approved."

"I know it," she said. "Of course I do. That is why I scorn all men's judgments, and laugh at honour, and disbelieve in truth. And because I see the falsity of all life people think *me* false. Because I am not cajoled by what people call honour, they think me insincere. Oh! I know it all. Have I ever, in all life, seen any truth? Has it not all been deceit? And yet, because I won't sit and give thanks in this atmosphere of unreality, they think me a heathen. Oh! it is too absurd!" And she gave that low laugh which had used to make Mrs. Baynard turn away from her in dislike and dread.

Sir James rose up. "I hope you are not the worse for being so outspoken," he said.

"I am better—always better for speaking to you," she replied. "Now you may forget the evil, and only remember the good—the *good*? Alas! I fear I have shown but small measure of that sort of thing. But I have seen it. You have no idea how people felt Letty's illness. How Miss Teague laboured, and a girl who often visits me—Sophy Cereseau, who has had no need to love the world over-much—how she toiled; and how others came around us, anxious to help, and give comfort. And I have learned to love the Penwarnes, and to admire Coombe. Oh! I am far better than I was. Good-bye. Thank you for coming," she said simply, holding out her hand. "My niece, Alice, is very pretty. I want Belton to marry her. Have you seen the Dynhams lately? I have so many things to say to you. Are you going to Hoffman's concert to-morrow? So many are to be there; and I like a thing of that sort by day-light. Three o'clock. If you'll go I'll take you."

"I'll go, then," said Sir James.

"You had better lunch here. You may see Mr. Drake then, perhaps. Mind, it is an engagement. Good-bye."

Lady Judith sat down, drew a Review towards her, and then began to cut the leaves with care and precision, as quietly as if she had not just left the luxury of laying bare her heart-wounds to the only person living who knew exactly what they were, and could feel for her. Mr. Drake only knew as much as it was in his nature to take in. But this older friend knew all, and had patience with her, and gave to her faith and trust. He credited her with more good than she would ever confess she possessed.





CHAPTER XXXI.

AS THE WORLD GOES.

Yet we are neither just nor wise
If present mercies we despise.—WITHERS.

“**L**ADY JUDITH, will you take me to this Concert?”

It was Sophy Cereveau who walked in and said this. Ever since they had been in London she had had free access to Lady Judith's morning-room, and day by day the kindness that had been brought out by Letty's illness grew and increased between them. Sophy was becoming very fond of Lady Judith, who had a great deal more in her than her aunt, Lady Dynham, and was a much more companionable person.

“Of course. I shall be delighted.” How pretty she looks, reflected Lady Judith, and she can't be more than five-and-twenty. “I am expecting a great musical treat. And I shall enjoy it all the more for your being with me; but I thought Lady Dynham would be sure to go.”

“So she would, only for this ball. She is gone to Dynely; there are people there in the house.”

“People!—well, what kind of people?”

“Ball people. Step-ladders, hammers, and long nails—Lady Dynham is gone, and I am to follow her with Smithson.”

“Does she want you?”

“No, not particularly. She couldn't do without Smithson, though.”

“Of course not. Let the woman go by herself, and spend a few days with me. I should like it extremely—do, Sophy.”

“You could not like it more than I should. Shall I—may I? Dear me, I should so like it,” said Sophy.

“I wonder if she is telling the truth?” thought Lady

Judith. "She is very pretty—elegant. That bonnet is perfect. I think—I think—really it would be an excellent joke——" She smiled as some unspoken possibility came to her, and Sophy was flattered and delighted.

"I am sure she likes me," was Sophy's unspoken thought. "She is such a hard, cold-judging woman—so critical—so expecting. Really to be liked by her quite sets one up in one's own estimation; it does one good, it makes me feel that if she has a good opinion of me, I must take pains to act up to it." "Lady Judith," she said, "are you sure—are you quite sure I shall not be in your way, and that you will like me to be here."

"My dear, I have said I shall like you to stay. I always say the truth."

"Oh, no!" Then Sophy looked red and frightened. "That slipped out. I beg your pardon. You always smile the truth, when you smile your own natural smile, as you are doing now—I will stay certainly, and send Smithson to Dynely this afternoon—but you *say* many things that may be your judgment—but are not the truth."

"Well, those things are *my* truth, my idea of truth. You got behind the scenes at Trederrick, and heard me call all life a fuss and an insincerity. Now, partly because I want to do myself good, I ask you to stay. I am glad to hear I can smile. And I am not angry to find myself in some sense understood—though you are a bold woman to tell me so."

"I did not mean to tell you. It really did slip out. But I could not love you and be afraid of you at the same time."

"Love me? Well I have no objection to be loved. It is very odd, but twice since Letty's illness people have talked to me of love. Mrs. Ferris and you. What can be the meaning of it? Just before my son died ten years ago—ten years is a long time out of anybody's life—he put his arms round my neck, and said, '*I love you.*' Never since that have I ever heard the word in connection with myself—never! My dear Sophy," she said, "fall in love. It is a good thing for a young woman to do. Make a man love you. Take pains about it. When you have succeeded, let it be the object of your life to keep his love. Don't be content with admiration—make him love you. It is very heavy work to do without it. I know from experience. You know I do; if you did not of course I should not tell you. Mr. Drake admires me exceedingly. He once found fault with the shade of the colour of one gown; but the next day

I wore modern gold ornaments with it, instead of some curiously set old garnets, and then he liked it very much. It was almost the only instance of his expressing disapprobation in plain terms of anything about me. And I admire Mr. Drake. When I married him I thought his features more regular than those of any other man. He was always perfect in his manner. If he lived on a desert island, he would dress for dinner. That is very nice in a man, and very respectable; but I advise you to try for more. I never tried, so I never got it. But you should. Love is the thing worth having—and what is worth having is worth seeking, and worth great pains in the keeping. I never fancy you the wife of a young man, Sophy. Take my advice, and don't be too particular as to age. Love never grows old. Somebody is coming. Dear, how late it is. Here is Sir James Luxton. How do you do? I am glad you remembered your promise. This is Sophy Ceresseau; I told you yesterday how good she was to me when Letty was ill."

Sophy blushed carnation. She thought of the nephew who had used her ill. But Sir James came to her with his pleasant smile, and singularly happy manner; and she took his hand, looking very well in her confusion, and making Lady Judith say in her heart, "It would do to perfection; James shall marry that girl. How happy she would make him!"

The idea grew into sudden strength, and found in Lady Judith's mind a most congenial resting-place. There was a droll sort of justice in the notion, too, that quite captivated her imagination. Sophy had no idea that Lady Judith knew her secret, so that lady felt there need be no delicacy in carrying out her plans. It would punish that mercenary Mr. Luxton, who would be cast down with ignominy from the standing-point of being his uncle's heir.

The more Lady Judith thought of thus making Sir James happy, and providing for Sophy's future, the more she was pleased, and the stronger grew her determination. She was left alone with Sir James, and she began to talk of old times, of Lady Dynham's youth, and of Mrs. Vellacomb's happy marriage.

"She is very happy," said Lady Judith, "and Mr. Vellacomb is the most excellent of husbands and of men; and as to Sophy, she is one of the best girls in the world; she is going to spend a few days, weeks perhaps, with me; she is

one of the things that do me good. James, why don't you marry?"

Sir James started; but Lady Judith's easy way and most tranquil face saved him from more than an instant's agitation.

"It was all very well while you had heirs; but now, you ought to marry, and do it at once. You must not look for money, you are too rich to care about that. But a well-educated, well-connected girl—one really of the right sort as to disposition—why don't you do it?" she asked calmly, and with just a touch of wondering reproof in her musical voice.

"Are you serious?"

"Why, the propriety of the thing—the common sense of it, is so obvious."

"I am sixty," he said.

"What has that to do with it? I won't pay compliments—but where is the young man better than yourself?"

"Where's the lady?" he asked, with a smile.

Then Sophy came into the room again, in her morning dress, prepared for luncheon, and Lady Judith looked at Sir James. No one could have detected anything in that look, yet it conveyed an answer to the question asked, and Sir James read it.

The luncheon went off pleasantly. Mr. Drake was pleased to see Sophy; he was pleased to hear his wife say, "Are you going to the concert?" He was full of work, he said, for the afternoon; and he had called on Lady Mary Cleverleigh, and thought Liza very pretty—Sophy blushed; but she too thought Liza pretty—and her aunt, Mrs. Cleverleigh's sister, was staying with them—Mrs. Gerard Daubency; she thought her very pleasant; and they were all going to Lady Dynham's ball.

"By-the-bye, the Penwurnes are coming up on Thursday," said Mr. Drake; "I met Freddy Goodman this morning. He asked after you——" to Lady Judith—"said he recollected you so well. Seven years it is since he bade us good-bye. He is a very handsome young fellow. He is going to call on you. I said you would be at the concert this afternoon—he'll be there too, I fancy."

"It is a most extraordinary thing about Mr. Carteray," said Sophy. "He has gone to America. He was very agreeable."

"The most agreeable man in our neighbourhood," said Mr. Drake, with emphasis. "His is a great loss."

"Yes; a pleasant, educated man," said Lady Judith. But she spoke very coldly. "Where are the Penwarnes going to be?" she asked.

"At Davis's Hotel. We shall hear from my sister to-night. Goodman said that Hugo had come up with him; rather in a hurry, on some business, but I don't know what. Did you hear from Letty this morning?"

"No. I should have told you if I had. I have not heard for two days."

"Ah, we shall be sure to hear to-night," said Mr. Drake—and then luncheon was over.

Just before going to the concert, Freddy Goodman came. "Do give me half-an-hour," he said, "by yourself; there, in the morning room." He said this after inquiry concerning many things at Trederrick, which had remained in his memory, but had been forgotten utterly by Lady Judith. "So many things happen," she said, walking away with him, "I don't remember riding with you to the Gwylder point, or scolding you for any crime, great or small. Of course I recollect *you*. Indeed you are scarcely changed; and I am flattered at your recollecting me. You would not know Letty again."

"I should have known her anywhere, and yet she is changed. Lady Judith, do you often see Lady Mary Cleverleigh?"

"Very often when in town; once in two or three years they come down to Lerrins. Have you seen them? They were very great friends of yours, of course. She, being your father's ward, was like one of yourselves; though she must have married when you were in petticoats, I should think."

"That is precisely what occurred. But then there was Liza."

"I expect her. I am taking her to this concert. Stay, and go with us if you like."

As soon as Liza's name was mentioned Freddy Goodman went on with his story. His love, his letters, messages, gifts, Lady Mary's talk, her general acceptance of his devotion, and finally, her information as to Liza's engagement to Mr. Luxton, whose income was so good, and whose prospects were immense.

"You see," said Freddy, in explanation, "that Mr. Luxton is the son of the eldest of three brothers, and so has the family estate, which is no better than mine. But the second

brother, leaving all he had amassed in a successful life of some sort, in China, to Sir James—he had turned it all into land—entailed it on this man after Sir James's death, if he left no son; and then Sir James himself has no other heir, and the title is made out to his nephew—the death of the China man's son," explains Freddy, with great freedom of speech, "and the deaths of those capital boys—" he pauses a moment—"I knew them, you know—makes Mr. Luxton quite a catch, and Lady Mary has made Liza say Yes."

"Made her? Are you sure?"

"I will make sure."

"How?"

"I'll see Liza, and ask her."

"Indeed!"

"Why not? I have my rights as well as any other man. I was first in the field, and I won't go back."

"I wish you success, if she does not love Mr. Luxton. You are true. But see Liza first, and do nothing in a hurry. Now we must go. I heard the carriage."

"I'll have my refusal from Liza's own lips," reiterated Freddy. They turned round—a girl stood in the doorway.

"I was shown into the next room; but this door between was open, and I thought I might come in."

"Yes. Do you know this gentleman?"

"Oh! Freddy!—oh! Captain Goodman! I was at home when you came to see my mother, and she said that she thought I should not care, and I was not sent for. Oh! I am very glad to see you again—very, very."

"My dear," he said, "I have got safely every scrap you ever wrote to me. I have got the myrtle safe you gave me from the porch at Lerrins, when I said Good-bye." I have never forgotten you for a moment."

"Then why did you not tell me so," she said, lifting a brave young face to his. "I had a right to know. You ought to have told me. No, don't speak. You could have written. I will be honest. I thought you would. I waited from the time I was seventeen, when you had only been three years absent—I waited four years, and you never said a word that any friend might not have said; and I am engaged to be married to Mr. Luxton. I blamed myself for a child's partiality, for a girl's vanity. I tore up my treasures—I broke free. How could you use me so; and then, when I am promised to another man, say this? I would rather not go to the concert. I am sure you will

forgive me, Lady Judith. The carriage is waiting—good morning.”

So she walked away; and all Lady Judith did was to ring the bell; and all she said was, “Go to the dining-room. Sir James will be lingering too long with Mr. Drake. We must go in ten minutes.”

But Freddy stood still, scared and irresolute. “But what am I to do?” he asked.

“Do as I bid you. And what I said before I say now wait.”

They went to the concert.

“You are to take care of me, Captain Goodman,” said Lady Judith.

Sir James knew a great deal about music; Sophy understood the thing quite well enough to enjoy some scientific talk. Lady Judith made him promise to join them on Thursday evening. “We will get Alice and her mother. They sing trios with Sophy quite charmingly.”

At night, with Mrs. Penwarne’s letter before her, Lady Judith sat, astonished at herself.

How wonderful that this interest in other people’s lives should have come upon me so suddenly! Is it well or ill to come out of my solitude and live at ease with my kind? Very heavily the woman sighed forth these questions, pitying herself. “Let other people be happy if they can,” she said to her questioning heart. “It may be possible to enjoy their joy—possible even to me, who have had so little of my own.” Then her final thought was, “I must get Liza here with the others on Thursday.”

Thursday came. The Penwarne’s were at Davis’s Hotel. Hugo had called on Lady Judith, and spoken of Freddy and his love-making.

“I told him to wait,” she said

“What is he to wait for?”

“Generally men are too impatient. It is safe to tell them to wait.”

“I can’t understand a man waiting for nothing.”

“You may wait on circumstances. There is a time for everything—you may wait on time. You may wait too on human nature. Liza is in a very disturbed state. He could not get justice now—only judgment. I am right. He must wait.”

“Thank you,” said Hugo; “I think you have taught me something.”

“Now talk to me of Letty,” said Lady Judith,

Hugo started.

"She is well now, I think; but she calls herself feeble, weak in nerve, perhaps; quiet, still asking for rest; but very happy to be left alone with our friend Miss Teague."

"Marian Teague is very wise," said Lady Judith, gently. "I suppose that I too must wait. I should be very glad to get Letty back to her former self."

"We never go back," said Hugo, "Great shocks of mind or body change us; we never get back to what we were in the old undisturbed state. We carry the marks of our experience with us to the end."

"Does Letty say so to you?"

"I never talk such hard truths to any one but you."

"Ah," she said, smiling on him pleasantly, "we know by intuition who those are who can understand." But she felt that she could not make Hugo gossip about Letty.

This had been said when Hugo called on her the day before the Thursday when the Penwurnes were to come. She had only one thing more to do that day, and that was to make Liza come and join them. She went on laughing at herself for the interest she was feeling in other people's lives. "I have been the world's slave for a week; I have been match-making, and getting great good out of small mercies. It would all be too sweet and sentimental if it were not for the fact that Mr. Luxton will be put to the torture, and get what he gave. I am sure we must reckon a little comforting revenge among the present mercies that we are taught not to despise."

Lady Judith was really becoming a great amusement to herself. "It all began with Mrs. Ferris and Syringa," she jeered at herself. Her mind was active in the work of self-examination, conducted on a plan hitherto entirely unknown and still of very doubtful profit. But the excitement was sufficient to surprise her; and the thought of Sir James really admiring Sophy Cerescau was exhilarating. "If he will only do it! Poor Liza! Lady Mary would send off Mr. Luxton without scruple. How well she would manage it! What talk there would be of a mother's feelings, and her child's early love! What hypocrites we all are!—what base schemers!—how we plot, and how we perjure ourselves, and all without one evil word, smiling with tears in our eyes, like pitying innocence, and yet as strong as iron in the determination to take care of ourselves."



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WORLD GOES ON.

As harmless violets, which give
Their virtues here
For salves and syrups while they live,
Do often calmly disappear,
And neither grieve, repine, nor fear.

HENRY VAUGHAN.



DEATH is always hard at work in this busy world, and he brings many more things to an end than these lives of ours.

The syrups are spilled, and so come to tragical ends never contemplated when our hearts first desired them, and our hands and brains brought them on towards perfection. And even those precious salves which have such healing in them come to an end also; their excellences lie dead, and no beneficial influences are left in them.

Those harmless violets that sweeten our spring when they calmly disappear, having done their intended number of good works, should only make room for other flowers; but now and then they reappear in most unexpected fashion, and seriously interfere with our peace.

Liza had made her syrups, and found their keeping qualities decidedly at fault. She had been sick at heart, and taken for her cure such salve as she could find; blaming herself for childish vanity, and determining to get a good healthy life out of the days allotted to her, and not to mind. But now something like a second spring had come. The violets were scenting every corner, and she could hardly walk for stepping on them. It had not been death, after all. The flowers had been gathered too soon, and the syrups had been ill-made—everything had been wrong except the violets—those joys of her young life—and there could not have been any death because the plants were all fresh and full of flowers again—and so now, what should she do with them?

This question she sat down at home meditating upon. It was the morning of that Thursday when it had been settled between Sophy Cerescau and herself that she should meet the Penwarne at Lady Judith's. And Lady Judith had written a little note—"Captain Goodman will not be here. He was engaged to come; but he stays away at my desire."

Liza's mother and aunt were in the room; and her mother began to speak.

"I cannot think why Liza should wish so much to go to this ball of Lady Dynham's. It is such a journey into Gloucestershire for a week at Dynely, and the fatigue of a ball; and then a house full of sportsmen. They are ridiculously fond of this countrified fête. I thought our going into Yorkshire would have saved us from an invitation. I have a great mind not to go. I am not strong enough. I do not believe Liza really wants to go. How should she?"

"Yes, mamma, but I *do* wish to go," said Liza, from her corner of meditation.

"My dear child," said Lady Mary, languidly, "I did not know you were there. But I am quite disabled by all this heat, and the return of hay-fever; and we should all be much better at home."

"Aunt Kattern, ask for me. I have ordered my dress; and I really do want to go. Why did we come back except to go to Dynely? So many people are going. There cannot be anything strange in wishing to be with the majority; and I really do want to go to this ball very much."

Aunt Kattern never spoke. A silence of some minutes ensued, only interrupted by a servant coming to the door, and saying, "Luncheon, my lady."

Then the languid invalid said, "Is Mr. Cleverleigh in?"

"No, my lady."

"Where is Brownson?"

On this, a strong-looking woman walked up to Lady Mary's chair, who rose, and took her arm, and so walked away, and downstairs to the dining-room.

Aunt Kattern and Liza followed silently; but it was an eloquent silence. The girl looked unutterable things into the aunt's sweet, grave, and yet indulgent face; but she could not get one glance from the soft eyes, for Prudence and Propriety had suggested to Aunt Kattern, otherwise Mrs. Gerard Daubeney, that she had better keep her eyes fixed on the carpet. So she answered the appeals of mute eloquence from Liza by droll little shakes of her pretty

head, and so got to luncheon without compromising herself.

Lady Mary had a little of the querulous ways that sometimes belong to the manners of a confirmed invalid; so now she said:

"How I do wish, Liza, that your father would be punctual. One good out of the evil, Kattern, of your husband having been sent abroad, is that you never have to wait for him."

"Because all my life is waiting; and I can do nothing else."

"Dear 'mamma, luncheon is not dinner," said Liza pettishly.

"Oh! dear, I only meant that he could have settled about this ball," cried Lady Mary, despairingly. Then Liza's face blushed very red. She could not say another word till the servants were out of the room. In a few minutes, however, they were left to themselves, and then Lady Mary's gentle voice began again, "As to the ball, dear Liza——"

"I am going," decided the girl. "Aunt Kattern will take me if you can't. She is asked, you know. If you dislike being alone, my father will stay at home if you ask him. I want you to give me a new thing for my hair. I will get something to-day, if I may. That white dress will look lovely, with the Brussels lace, and little water-lilies. My head-dress must match it. How much may I spend? Will you see Madame la Queue to-day? She is coming to me. I think of changing my style of hair-dressing. You said something once about it yourself."

It was Liza's way to wear her mother down by uttering a torrent of facts in the prettiest possible way. She, in this manner, swept away all difficulties, and smoothed down anticipated objections.

"Of course; order what you please. Aunt Kattern is a great deal too indulgent. Your father never refused me anything in his life. I am glad you are going to change that way with your hair. I thought yesterday it was growing old. But as to your sudden love of visits and balls, anybody would think you were not engaged to be married."

"Nobody knows—it's a ridiculous secret!" And Liza tossed her head a little scornfully. "But I *am* going to be married; and before long I think everybody must be made quite sure of *that*."

"I wonder if Mr. Luxton would like your going——"

"Don't say another word, mother. Things get ruined if they are too much dwelt on before coming to pass."

"Things? Oh dear!"

"Yes. Men, women, and weddings; balls, lovers, and husbands—only my head-dress wants to be thought of now. Good-bye. I am going to take Brownson out with me. And, oh! I am going this evening to Lady Judith Drake's; I am going to practise trios with Alice Penwarne and Sophy Cerescau. Brownson must come in the carriage for me at night; and I will leave it early. I want to be back again by half-past ten. Kiss me, please, mother. Aunt Kattern, come with me."

"Don't leave me alone, child; and as to your engagement being a secret, you know I was obliged to tell Lady Dynham—and it really has been a secret till now. I felt that I could trust *her*, you know. And I was also *obliged* to tell Captain Goodman. I did not mind that, as it was to be announced so soon. If Lady Dynham had been going to give this ball in Yorkshire, where their real home is, I should not have disliked your going. We are all in a neighbourhood there, and Mr. Luxton so near; but to expect their friends to trail after them to another part of the world, because they want to keep up a yearly custom of doing the 'fine old English gentleman,' is quite another thing. They will never think of asking Mr. Luxton; and I believe all sorts of people are always there. I am, as you know, far too ill to go; and it's very hard to be left alone to please Lady Dynham."

Liza kissed her mother. "Please to take my arm instead of Brownson's, she can't have eaten her dinner yet."

So Liza took this inconsistent mother back to the drawing-room, and then went to Aunt Kattern.

"Liza, you are audacious," said that lady. "I really did not intend to go to Dynely."

"You intended always to be good and gracious, which means, at this moment, giving me my own way, and enabling me to take my pleasure in having it. How I like the thoughts of it all! How glad I am that I am going out this evening. I really could not have found patience to stay at home."

Mrs. Dauboney took Liza's hand, and looked with steady sensible eyes into her face. "Something is changing you, Liza."

"I am going to be married. Did you not hear my mother speak of Mr. Luxton just now? No one ever forgets him."

Of course I don't. It is *that* that changes me. I am going to be married."

Aunt Kattern detected a certain hardness in Liza's voice, which made her shudder; and she saw a certain sort of brightness in the girl's eye that almost made her weep. "Are you happy?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Liza bravely. "My father says I am a happy girl. What do I know of happiness? I have never been sad. In order to know you are happy I should think you must know a little, at least, of its contrary. 'Judgment comes by experience.' I wrote that in my copy-book when I was a child."

Mrs. Daubeney stopped the arguer's mouth with a kiss. No more was said then; but when Liza was waiting in her room that night for the carriage to take her to Lady Judith's, Aunt Kattern appeared.

"How do I look?" asked Liza. "This is my new style."

"It becomes you. You are like one of Hogarth's women—like the picture of your great grandmother in the library at home."

"Well," said Liza, "yes; it struck me too. I am decidedly like her. Oh! dear, and she was so naughty, wasn't she?"

"My love! Not that I ever heard of. You should not say such things."

"Oh! but it's true. And I know. And I have read all the letters."

"What can you mean?"

"She was betrothed in the blue drawing-room to Sir Marmaduke Granvill, and she curtsied low when he put the ring of betrothal on her finger, and two tears trembled on her long eyelashes, and when one of them fell on her pretty little hand, he kissed it off; and then her mother—the great gaunt woman in a riding-dress, you remember—the great strong-minded mother clasped her in her terrible arms, and the poor child swooned away, and all beholders were struck with her sweet sensibility. One of them wrote the letter telling all about it, by reading which I learnt those points of the Cleverleigh history; and then the next day, early in the morning, the girl was gone, and the betrothal ring was left on the dressing-table, and before ten o'clock she had married Squire Wyvern, who espoused her in a scarlet coat, threatening all the time to lay his great whip across the shoulders of the best of parsons, if he did not read faster, and get the binding words said before the Cleverleigh of

that day could claim his daughter. After that, you know, her only child married the Cleverleigh heir, and so the properties became united. She loved the rude man in scarlet, and could not care for the gentle Sir Marmaduke, so I called her naughty. It is quite a pity that I should be so exactly like her."

"I did not say 'exactly,'" said Mrs. Daubeney, with a smile.

"Ah! but I feel it, though," said Liza.

Aunt Kattern did not like this kind of talk. She was sure that her niece had only begun on this odd sort of conversation very lately.

"I am so glad that your engagement to Mr. Luxton is now to be announced. I have always disliked its being kept a secret."

"It was his doing, not mine," said Liza, carelessly. "I wonder if I shall see Sir James to-night? I should like to get that interview over. It was a sort of a shame not to tell *him*; and I'll say to him, when we meet, that the concealment was not mine. Mamma says Mr. Luxton wished me to go through the ordeal of a London season. I have never been ceremoniously shown to an admiring world. My father says Mr. Luxton is by nature cautious"—Liza heard the carriage announced—"I am coming," she said. Then she gave one look to the long glass, and laughed merrily. "Oh! Aunt Kattern, fancy a man being over-cautious about acknowledging an engagement to *me*!"

"Oh! Liza, and you are going to marry him?"

"The things I thought dead are alive again. Wait. I think something *must* happen to-night."

It was a charming party at Lady Judith's. The Pen-warnes were delighted to see Liza. When Lady Judith bid the girl good night, she said—"I wish you had talked more to Sir James."

"He was always so occupied."

"He is going to marry again. Sophy Ceresseau will be very happy. It is no secret. My best regards to your mother."

"Oh!" It was a long considering oh! which was followed by an eloquent smile.

"Mother," said Liza, giving her the "good-night" kiss, "Sir James is going to be married. Guess—to whom?"

"Impossible, child!" Lady Mary sat upright in her bedroom easy-chair, and the lace about her face shook angrily.

"He is engaged to Sophy Cerescau—such a good match! He is young for his age, so clever and handsome, before the world a hero—oh! I like that kind of man. I am going to write a note to Sophy before I sleep. Be sure you tell papa directly; and I don't the least want to go to Lady Dynham's ball. I hope I was not too positive this morning; I would much rather go to Lerrins. It would do you good, so pray think of it, and make my father understand. Now, have a good night; and I have been delightfully happy, and I ought to go." Poor Lady Mary!

"I really never understood his wishing to make such a secret of his proposal to Liza. There must have been something to conceal. I never liked it"—this she said to her husband, who had heard the news about Sir James with infinite amusement.

Mr. Luxton was dismissed, and Liza was free.

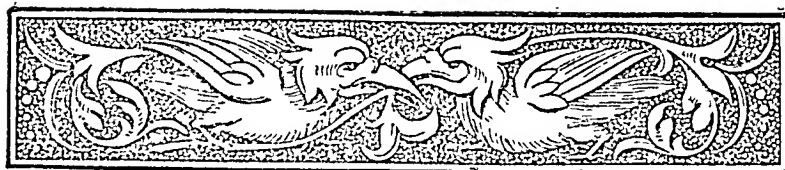
It all went as softly as a summer breeze. There are heights where storms are unknown. In a certain sort of society "scenes" don't occur. Everybody kept their secrets in a manner which might have been a lesson to Lady Dynham.

The entertainment in Worcestershire came to pass. It had to be put off for a month for Sophy's sake; that lady and her husband were on their wedding tour. Lord and Lady Dynham had come back to town for three days, just that Sophy might be married from their house; and on the wedding day they had gone back again. The marriage had been the signal for the sudden dispersion of all the women and men of the Trederrick, Coombe, and Dynely party. All well pleased at the London time having come to so good an end; all very quiet, secretly amused and silently glad.

Only, at Marsland, old Sir Harry Goodman was a little loud in his declarations of entire satisfaction. "I tell Mary her heart was always here at Lerrins, and among the old friends. They have promised to spend the winter here."

This last sentence was a great diplomatic effort. The words meant that his boy—the best boy in the world, his Freddy—was to be married before Christmas. No one ever thought of Mr. Luxton; he never complained. He was heard of, in a cautious state of mind, making investments in French railways, and being "attentive," after his fashion, to an American millionaire.

"And so, after all," said Alice, "the world has never quite stood still."



CHAPTER XXXIII.

KINDNESS.

Man is dear to man, the poorest poor
Long for some moments, in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they have been,
Themselves, the fathers and the dealers out
Of some small blessings, have been kind to such
As needed kindness ; for this single cause .
That we have all of us a human heart.—WORDSWORTH.

LIFE is made up of little things ; an observation often made, and nearly as often forgotten. It was a truth which Letty Drake—left at Coombe, and ranging in an untrammelled liberty over Trederrick under the care of Miss Teague—was learning and practising every day.

Her life at Trederrick had been a life of suffering and labour ; at Coombe, of contemplation and health-giving ease. Now, with Miss Teague, it was a life of sympathy.

It half frightened Letty to feel how happy it had made her. The springing up of new interests in her life alarmed one whose whole existence had been one of renunciation. It is true she had been a benefactress, and had had the blessings and love of the poor ; but the blessings had fallen on barren soil, and love had never done her any good. Now it was different ; she could not tell why. Perhaps the heart that had suffered the ploughshare of deep grief to rend and furrow it was in reality not broken, but prepared for the good seed that should bear fruit a hundred fold. Perhaps in the past season of rest at Coombe that heart had received those healing dews that nourish the seed and bring the green to perfection. Anyhow, she was left there to be still, and the wish had come to labour, and to love ; not as in the

sunless, unprofitable past, but to win blessing and to be strong once more; but in a better, more enduring strength.

She had discovered the truth that we are kind and merciful, not altogether to bless the object of our charity, but because we cannot do without the good that such things bring to ourselves. She gave and she received.

She learnt more of the world around her in those few weeks with Miss Teague than in the whole of her previous life at Frederrick; and the larger the range of her sympathy, the less she pitied herself, the less she feared to be unhappy, the more she understood that the grievous things of life had to be lived down, and that there is no such thing as a day without mercy, or a trial without good. In a word, she had found that she was not above receiving; and when the heart is open to receive as well as to give, then there is natural action and healthy life. And she had received the gift of understanding.

Thus the reward came for what she had suffered.

She began to think that there was some mysterious gain out of her great loss, and that to rejoice with those who have joy for their portion, and to weep with those who suffer, can only be truly done by such as have had experience of both kinds. So she began to live the life that lay before her with a new and a better strength.

"Whose soul was like a star and dwelt apart—"

that, in a vague sort of way, Letty had thought would be the isolated condition of herself through all future life. Her trial, being her secret also, had, she thought, quite separated her from the life around. This impression continued after recovery, till she was left alone with Marian Teague in the little world they called their own. And then another knowledge came—that there was no such thing as living alone in any right and virtuous way;

"That we have all of us a human heart;"

and that hope and love, pain and sorrow, come to all. So Letty shook herself free from her lonely captivity of soul, and said, "Either we are all heroines—or there are none at all."

The common lot comes to each in some way or other, according to their lives, and their positions. Yes, there are

many deaths foreshadowing the great one, let there be resurrection also.

The life she led was a wholesome life and peaceful. It was peaceful to go to Frederrick and superintend the packing of those tin boxes of flowers that went three times a week to Lady Judith. There was a new interest in watching the state and produce of the hot-houses, and the condition of the autumn fruits that were to appear at her mother's table. Reading her mother's notes too—for it was her mother, not her father, who wrote to Letty—was an event; answering them was a sort of trial generally. Up would rise the recollection of her ruined life, and stand like a witness between her mother and herself, for Letty never doubted that in some way her mother had separated Cecil from her, and this made the thought of that man too intolerable—that he, who knew so much, should leave her so—that one who had confessed to her his knowledge of possible difficulty should give way at the first word and leave her to the terrible trial of silence—“*he knew that my mother would never explain.*” The thought vexed her. It made it very difficult sometimes to write to her mother; and the difficulty was not made less by the idea of her mother being glad to write kind things, by a feeling that she could detect little unusual scraps of feeling hidden away among common-place words—as if there was, she knew, something to be patched up. Almost with a gesture of scorn Letty would put such notes away from her. Then, penitentially, she would take them up, answer them meekly, and forgive her mother once more. It was a relief to get away to the grassy headland, and sit down with Marian Teague, talking, reading, working—sheltering under some upstanding rock where the sheep had worn little caves in the shelving stone at the base, and rest both body and mind. It was a merciful, amusing, health-giving variety to hear Martha Gedd's prattle about the baby, for whom the neat pink frocks and pinafores had been made and trimmed by Letty's unaccustomed fingers, which had known more of pens and ink than of needles and thread.

“Yes, ma'am, I always say of those we have, fourteen months' care, and do our best by them, and be baptized and vaccinated; and this one has been on both arms, and is called Charles. He was baptized the eleventh of August, on a Thursday. And I have said it of all, which is three, fourteen months' care, and do our best.”

"And after fourteen months?" calmly asks Letty.

"Well, ma'am, mostly they run off by that time."

Old Mrs. Gedds, detecting a smile on Letty's face, it is to be feared, says, with approval and authority, touching her daughter-in-law, "She is a very good mother—a very good mother is Martha, and thanks to be," with a slight curtsy, meant to fill up, as by an appropriate pantomime, the unfinished phrase. Letty recovers her usual composure, and says the children always look so pretty, so clean, so neat, and she hopes the arm will go on well. "Sure to, ma'am," replies the older matron, as if to suspect otherwise was to mention a possibility suggestive of reproach—"Sure to." And so Letty cannot go till she has recovered her place in Mrs. Gedds' estimation, and is obliged to make inquiries after old Johnny Mitchel, and to ask Mrs. Gedds to do her a favour. Of course she will; and all frowns are cleared off instantly. Will Mrs. Gedds find out if the tobacco with which Captain Penwarne usually supplies him is finished, and if so, give him some from her?

The mission is accepted with smiles. The baby crows loudly, to the mother's "pretty dear," and Letty walks off with a bag of gingerbread to the school; and then to Miss Teague's cottage, where they are to lunch before spending an hour on the sands.

It was a splendid end to a glorious summer. Letty, by degrees, had accustomed herself to the revisiting of many places which she had once dreaded to see again. She had gone to Marsland; she had listened to Sir Harry's accounts of Cecil Carteray; she had received Mrs. Carteray's half-angry murmurs, half-despairing hopes as to her step-son's desertion of her; she had heard Sir Harry laugh, and vow that they need think no more about him now Freddy had come back. Freddy was true; Freddy was never going to say one thing and do another; Freddy was not the boy to forget those who had never forgotten him—neither would he talk stuff about the over-civilization of Old England, and the joys of an untrammelled life. "What did Cecil mean?" Sir Harry asked angrily. "Why, he will be off to the Salt Lake. He'll turn Mormon. He wants to have as many wives as will work for him." Then he would turn again to his boy—his Freddy. "Going to be married, bless him! Going to be married to the very girl I had picked out for him years ago. And that story of her being engaged to James Luxton was one of Lady Mary's fairy-

tales. She wanted it, so she said it. But when his uncle took that charming girl, Miss Cereseau—ah! you will have to paint your cheeks to look as well as she does, my dear, though you are a beauty when you look your best,” says Sir Harry. “When Lady Mary saw James Luxton with a married uncle—a lovely stroke of fortune, but well deserved—then she likes my boy best. Oh! an old intriguer is Lady Mary. I was very glad when Mr. Cleverleigh took her off my hands. They are coming to Lerrins. ‘It’s given to the girl by the marriage settlements—supposing there was no son—I did that.’ And Sir Harry laughs, and is exceedingly happy, and Letty rejoices with him, finds good discipline in the old man’s talk, taking it patiently, and is rewarded by three brace of partridges. “Shot by my own hand, though my arm can’t take the gun as it once could. Are you never going to shoot your Trederrick and Coombe birds? What are those men about, my dear?”

“They are shooting at Dyncly. My father is gone to Berlin, but Captain Penwarne is coming to Coombe very soon—any day, in fact; we heard so last week.”

“Gone to Berlin? Well, and where’s your mother?”

“She went to Norwood when my father left England,” Letty says. “When she comes to Trederrick I shall go to her, and my visit at Coombe will come to an end.”

“And where are the bride and bridegroom?”

Letty tells how Sir James and Lady Luxton are gone to Scotland, and Sir Harry is again delighted with that match. “It gave Freddy his wife,” he says with loud delight; “gave me my daughter-in-law—the very girl I picked out for him. And how quiet the old lover kept his story! Take care of the old lovers, Miss Letty,” he cries; “their aim is steady, their minds well made up; and then they settle up matters in a moment, declaring that they have no time to lose. And I think some of our young ones might study their style with advantage. We should have less nonsense talked, a little more forbearance shown, not to say gratitude, and fewer goings-off to the Normons, like——”

Everybody laughs. Letty has laughed! It nearly brought the tears to her eyes to find that she had done so. And the next minute, with loud farewells, Sir Harry had taken her to the carriage, and she was speaking of Lerrins to Miss Teague, and the old days when Jane Drake was taken there to meet the Goodman girls and little Lady Mary, and be present at an out-door children’s banquet of strawberries and cream.

When Letty had arrived at this happy point of strength, she determined on a triumph. And she won it.

She went to Mrs. Baynard's. She heard her talk of Cecil Carteray, and her declarations of Freddy's having come like a blessing to make them forget him, and prevent their suffering anything by his absence.

"I declare no one regrets him," said Eleanor Baynard, with energy. "He could only have had the power of affecting the surface of things. He was very bright, and gilded one's life like a gentle sunbeam sometimes, certainly. But now he is passed away! and no one hurt, no one wanting him. The fact was that Cecil was cruel and selfish—selfish without knowing it. I begin to think that some people may be selfish, quite without the smallest tincture of wrong. He shone because it was his nature; we went into his shining because we liked it, and we asked it into our lives. Then he went, and we grumbled. We had loved him better than he had loved us. That is all. He did not care. He is shining on some one else now, and caring just as little. I hope they may have a Freddy to heal up their hearts, and wipe out his memory, and fill his place with real love, and real faithfulness, when Cecil goes off to glitter elsewhere. But it has been a great bore," says Mrs. Baynard; "and I must say that the patience my sister has with him, the regularity of her writing, the thought she bestows on such an ingrate, does vex me. If she did not write clever letters, and so amuse him, he would burn them unread."

Letty, as it had been before, was teaching a mystery to Mrs. Baynard's patient fingers; and when Laura ran by the window, it was difficult to believe that a change so great had happened to her as to influence all her life, and make her lonely in heart, bruised in spirit, broken for ever; changed. Struggle as she did, and conquer as she was conquering, yet no effort could wipe away the change. Changed she would be through all life. And Cecil had done this.

She talked quietly, counted stitches, said how the thread was to be here or there, detected the first inclination to go wrong, and confirmed the uncertain hands in the ways that were right, while still Mrs. Baynard talked.

"Why does not Hugo come? What can keep him at Dynely?"

"Shooting, I suppose. But he is coming to Coombe. He wrote to Miss Teague the other day—Yes, the thread in front now; that is right—the same three times

over—He is going to bring somebody with him; and he expects your brother will be at Marsland by that time.”

“I suppose he will. But he is in attendance on Liza. Lady Mary says she is going to Biarritz. When do you expect Lady Judith?”

“No time is fixed. You know my father is gone to Berlin; my mother asked me to come to her at Norwood, if it would please me.”

“And will it please you?”

“Oh, nothing pleases me, I think, that is not either Trederrick or Coombe. How could one leave such a sea as this?”

“It looks lovely to-day,” said Mrs. Baynard. “And I always enjoy the fish time. The bay is full of pilchards. And you going?”

“I thought I would walk through your shrubbery to Trederrick. I shall go back to Coombe by the crag-path.”

“Go that way if you like; and come again. I have seen so little of you lately.” Mrs. Baynard kissed Letty, and looked at her anxiously. “You do not overtax your strength? You are careful not to be in the sun?”

“Oh! I take great care of myself; and I am really well—I am indeed. I shall look pale, I suppose, till I am braced by the winter frosts. But I am well—I am indeed.”

“I want to hear so much more than I have yet heard about Sophy Cereseau’s wedding. It was a crowning mercy for Freddy. And I used to see Sir James when, years ago, before he went to India, he came to Trederrick. About the time your little brother died—can you remember it? He came there several times; and we all admired him. In spite of the great difference of age, I think Sophy may be very happy.”

“Sir James is a delightful man. My father and mother have always been fond of him,” said Letty; “and I will send you Alice’s letter about the wedding. She gave me an excellent account of it. It was a very quiet, happy, sensible sort of wedding. Only two bridesmaids; and Sophy wore a bonnet, but such a pretty one, that everybody might desire to wear such ever more; and he looked quite magnificent. And Alice says my mother was the handsomest woman there, and that my father said so.”

“Where was Mrs. Penwarne?” asked Mrs. Baynard.

“Oh! how rude you are!” laughed Letty. “Well, Aunt Jane was not there. Very few people were there; and the

bride and bridegroom started for Edinburgh, looking as if they had been ten years man and wife. And in the afternoon Lord and Lady Dynham went back again to Dynely: and two days after Alice and Aunt Jane and Colonel Penwarne followed them. And all that remains to be told, Alice's letter will tell you. I will send it this evening."

"Was Hugo there?"

"No. But I must really go now."

"We will come to Coombe, and read the letter there," said Mrs. Baynard.

"Oh! yes; pray do." And then Letty took her departure by the window, and went across the turf, on by the path through the shrubs; and she stood still where Cecil had spoken to her, and told her to say how she loved him.

It was not to grieve or to repine that she stood there, but to accustom herself to the truth, and to grow strong.

Some girls ought to have spoken—ought to have told their parents, perhaps; but she could not. It had not belonged to her life to do that. The whole sorrow had been confined to her own heart. It had suffered its bitterness, and it had now, as far as was possible, recovered from its shock.

Once again the thought came to her that she had no future, that Hope had nothing any more to do with her; and once again she felt that it was not bad to live for *to-day*, and to be content with life as each morning brought it to her, and each sunset closed it in; to live a life in which, of all its inhabitants, herself was least of all.

Through Trederrick, by the house on the terrace, standing and looking over the parapet on the golden gorse and purple heath, and gaudy colouring of the late-flowering shrubs that flourished on the bank below; through the conservatory, to choose flowers for her mother, up the garden walks, and

the fruit-tree wall; then to the door that led out to the carriage-drive, where she had met Cecil, and up the crag-path, where she had first known the—as it seemed to her most glorious—truth that he loved her; then to the shadowy corner where the laburnums grew on the lawn at Coombe, and—"Oh! Letty, you have been wandering too far this day. You look exhausted. I will not trust you out alone again if you abuse my confidence."

"No, no," Letty said, "I have been very good. I have been sitting with Mrs. Baynard. Scold me for gossiping; I have done nothing worse."

That evening, when Letty took out Alice's letter for Mrs. Baynard to read, she opened the last that her mother had written to her, and read it again. There was something about it which the girl felt to be unusual. Her mother's notes were generally of the most simple sort, but there was a touch of strangeness in this one which Letty could not explain. It began:

"Your father is just gone to Dover by the train that enables him to cross to Calais to-night. I did not tell you before that he contemplated a short visit to Berlin, because he said every day that he was going to write to you himself, and, as you know, I never interfere with intentions great or small. Before he went, however, he said that he had not written, and he asked me to do so. He would have gone a fortnight ago, but Sophy's husband seemed to expect him to be present at his marriage. I go to-night to Norwood. You know I like the place, and I think I may stay till your father returns. If you wish for a change, come to me; but give me notice a day or two before of your wishes. I might be wandering. Send flowers to me there, if you can take the trouble without too much fatigue. Rowe does not pack them as you do. Can't you teach him? I hear that Hugo Penwarne may bring a shooting-party to Coombe. I would come back to Trederrick, if you wanted me; but Hugo is not likely to bring a noisy party, and he is so pleasant, and you are such good friends, that you may have no cause to wish to escape. Belton stayed in London two or three days after his father and mother went to Dynely. He came here twice, evidently for the pleasure of saying, as often as he pleased, how beautiful Alice looked at the wedding. It was quite true. He has followed the Penwarne to Dynely, where the yearly fête comes off shortly."

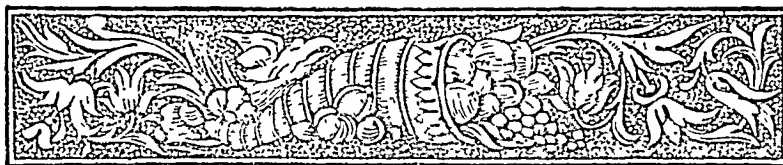
According to Letty's experience, this was a very long letter; also, it was very remarkable to find her mother condescending to telling news; further, never before in her life had Lady Judith spoken or written in that way of Mr. Drake to her daughter. Letty looked at the sentence, "I never, as you know, interfere with intentions, great or small," and she felt as if her mother had come down from the cold silent niche she usually occupied as a mere gazer on her life and her father's, and had made a confidence to her. The constrained life that Letty had led towards her mother made her feel a great surprise on reading this. She knew with the most positive certainty that her mother

meant to be kind to her—meant, somehow, to place her more on an equality than she had ever done before—not to draw her from her father, but yet to give her a little bit of herself.

Letty knew very well that Lady Judith did not love Mr. Drake. As her eyes rested on this letter, she said in her heart—"Well, perhaps I may understand it one day; and I think she wants to be kind."

The things she had done that day were very little things, and yet she felt that by their means she had accomplished great ends. Her heart was less shut up, her spirit less isolated. Kindness had come back to her, she thought.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

GOING AND GONE.

In my heart's temple I suspend to thee
These votive wreaths of withered memory.

SHELLEY.

MR. DRAKE'S determination to go to Berlin had been taken before Sophy Cereseau's marriage, and put off exactly for the cause given in Lady Judith's letter to Letty. She had told it quietly enough, as if it had been of no more meaning than Lady Mary's threatened flight to Biarritz, but it had been a great event in her life, nevertheless; and it had come on Lady Judith strangely and suddenly, and in consequence of an event of which she had had to be told by an ambassador.

She was sitting in that room, which wore always the most perfect aspect, as the home sitting-room of a woman well born and well educated, and where only those who were admitted to her home-life had access, when Sir James Luxton came in. He was always welcome, and she told him so.

"Give me half-an-hour alone," he said.

"Why?" she asked. "I am expecting Hugo. He has become quite a gossip of mine. I promised him."

"Break your promise. Say you are unexpectedly engaged on business. It is no business," he said earnestly; but she laughed. "I came from Mr. Drake," he said gravely. Then she looked in the old, cold, half-scornful way, and gave the order to the servant who answered the bell—"If Captain Penwarne comes, as I think probable, say I am sorry not to see him—give him this." She had written a note of a few words only—"I am engaged on business of Mr.

Drake's." And then she and Sir James were left alone. One moment's silence was enough. Then he said:

"I come from Peter. He will have to go to Berlin—soon; in a few days. He wished me to say to you—that the woman is dead."

"The person he married?" she asked, with a white face.

"Yes."

"Oh!" she said; and took up some pretty needle-work from her little velvet-covered table, and began to work.

"I think you should try to understand it."

"But I never have been under the smallest misapprehension," she said, with mild, wondering eyes fixed on his honest face.

"Nevertheless, Lady Judith, you have been very——" He stopped.

"Please to say what. I will promise to bear it. I have been very—well?"

"Provoking," he said.

"I have been simply nothing at all," she exclaimed.

"Was ever such an accusation made on such empty evidence?"

"There is a thing to understand, and you won't understand it. Lady Judith, in a short time—a time to be counted now by hours—I shall be again married, and to a wife of your choosing. I feel very strongly that I can never speak to you again about this thing."

"No; of course not. It is a secret between us now; and you will have no secrets then. The past Sophy will have no right to; but with your future she will claim her share. You are quite right. We can never speak again of this. And, indeed, why should we? I thank you, James, for all the good you have been to me, and for all the faithful friendship you have shown Mr. Drake. I thank you very heartily. Oh! I am so glad to know that I shall love your wife."

"Thank you—thank you," he said, even with emotion, taking her offered hand. "I believe that you will have given me a great reward in Sophy—thank you for that too. But I must not wander away from my subject. I have to speak once more of the past, and of Peter. I confess it pains me."

"Don't trouble yourself. Don't I know it all?"

"You would be more merciful, and happier, if you understood it all."

"My comprehension of the whole thing is perfect, and my understanding of it very much beyond anything you could arrive at. Listen. Mr. Drake, shortly after he was of age, marries—no matter who—where the law of marriage differs from our own. He was exactly the man to marry beneath him, provided the girl was pretty, and capable of worshipping him. He had a private enjoyment in it which was, no doubt, very precious and gratifying to one of his disposition. Then the girl had parts, and he instructed her. It was a fine idea to *make* his wife. It suited his character to do so great a thing, and to show her to an admiring world, when finished, as the wonderful thing he had, in his hours of leisure, created. The girl was a good girl, very graceful—she was that when I saw her—and very pretty, I heard; but of that I did not see any remains."

"Peter never told me who she was," said Sir James.

"Oh! I passed that over, thinking you knew. Her mother, a widow, with this one child, was a public singer, and an actress, of great merit, I believe. One night, owing to an accident by fire at the theatre, she was so injured that she died after a few days. Mr. Drake was very kind and liberal, and when he found she had this one girl, a pretty creature, as the story goes, of little more than sixteen, he took her, and married her, and proceeded to educate her for the position he honestly intended her to fill. He kept that position a secret from her, wisely enough; as, if death had come to him in his father's life-time, this inheritance would have gone elsewhere. At last, however, his father did die; and Mrs. Drake heard from some one of the truth that had still been kept from her. Two children had been born. She demanded to be taken to his English home and acknowledged. He refused, saying she was not yet fit for it. Can't you imagine how he would go on irritating her?" asked Lady Judith, with a smile on her face. "She told me all about it herself, when I went to see her after her son's death. I took quite a fancy to her, she told it so well. The coldness of the man, the determination to carry out his plan, the instructing—oh, the instructing! It must have driven her half mad; for she got violent, which made him calmer than ever, and much more than ever resolute. She was so dreadful one day that he locked her up. But she had written of her wrongs to an old but very distant relative, who sent his son to ascertain the truth. He arrived at this happy moment, and took her, somehow or other, out

of her prison, and to a house where Mr. Drake refused to see her; and out of all that the divorce came, and Mr. Drake dowered her for his children's sake, and the hero who had come to her relief married her. It was this man who set himself to claim the entailed estates for the boy. He is dead; and she married a third time. And now——?"

"Now she is gone," said Sir James; "having been again a widow. On her death-bed she wrote a letter telling Peter that their daughter had had an accident in her childhood, from the effects of which she had never recovered. She has been for some time in an asylum for persons who are imbecile. To this girl she asked him to continue an annuity. Peter, who has never trusted any one but me in this matter, immediately determined to go by himself to the place where she lives, and arrange for her maintenance. Thus the story comes to an end," concluded Sir James.

"Not quite. Please to gratify me this last time of gossiping by explaining what you mean by saying I have been perverse?"

"You know, I think, Lady Judith. Anyway, I won't explain myself."

"You have always wanted me to feel that Mr. Drake ought to be felt for, and, if felt for, forgiven, for having concealed all this and married me. It is, I suppose, the point on which we must always disagree. Such pride and contempt as I, in the earlier days of my married life showed him, I hope I did full penance for when I lost my boy. I was, till that other boy died, obliged, by the news that I had heard, to be glad that my own son was dead. I was very glad. I was glad that we could not either of us be put to any open shame by the appearance of an elder heir. If, since then, after standing by that other grave in another land, I have wished for him back again, that sad, fruitless desire may reckon as penance too, perhaps; for I have led a lonely life."

"Will you forgive me when I say—and I only say it hoping to influence the future for good—that you are very hard, very unapproachable, very contemptuous to all the world; and that some of your loneliness must be traced to yourself?"

"You put it very truly," she said; "but you can never know what my life was. Why, he was so utterly a self-worshipper that he was bent on changing *me*! If a man makes himself stony, and confessedly intends to bring you

under his feet, and there to mould you into something else with his marble hands, is it any use to meet such a man, and such a moment as that, with a heart and hands of softness and flesh and blood? I met him with his own weapons. I conquered sufficiently for my own peace. I hope I never intended to make him unhappy for mere tyranny's sake. I refused to part with this house, which I had left to me for my own use; I insisted on receiving my pin-money; I refused to give him up the money which came to me yearly from the trustees who had the care of my own fortune. All that was mine I kept. He hated me for it. He had spent more than twenty thousand pounds in gambling, for no other reason but because old Lord Dynham had warned him to beware of it. He would not be dictated to. He lost all that to show his independence. Then he paid without betraying a pang, to show his coolness, and never gambled again, to show his strength. I refused to allow Jane and Marian Teague to live with us on our return to England, because I knew he would use them as an audience to get plaudits out of, and pity, for having married so determined a wife. You know how that ended. I conquered so far as to have a life of melancholy peace. It was the best I could get; and I was determined to win the independence necessary for it. I gave up my daughter to him. That too may count for penance if I have ever really behaved ill to Mr. Drake. But, in fact, I really believe that he would have wrecked himself in the eyes of this censorious world if I had not attracted some of its notice to myself, and lowered himself among men if I had not insisted on our living in a way fitted to my birth and station. The curious part is that, when I had conquered him, and when I knew the story of his marriage, *he repented*. I am sure he did. We have had some sort of peace ever since. He gave up trying to twist everything into *his own* life, and bend every desire of every heart about him into *his own* will; and it was not my nature to pursue my victories. I had won enough peace to give me rest at night, and food in comfort. I never asked for more. Of course all the witnesses of our lives thought ill of me. If I had wanted a friend, I could not have found her. Suddenly the poor girl came—a girl I had never troubled myself to like or dislike—your Sophy—came into my life and blessed me. A great black cloud was lifted off my path. I could see sunshine again. I could believe in healthy pleasure, and give thanks for love. I

could not part with Sophy except to an old friend. I am so glad you are going to marry her, James."

"Thank you," he said, rising to go—"thank you, Judith."

She smiled. The sound of her name came pleasantly, as from the old young days when she had had no quarrel in her life. She gave him her hand.

"Am I to be the bearer of any message?" he asked.

"I think I will speak to him myself," she said. "Good-bye."

When the time came to speak to Mr. Drake, pleasant words passed between them. He had come rather as a coward to the interview; but there was no trial of any kind in store for him.

She began the subject by saying, "Sir James has given me your message. Shall you be long away?"

"Oh! no. I confess I should like a run to Dresden for a few days."

"Then it would be a pity not to take it," she answered.

"What is to be done with your letters?"

"I'll write. Would you take the trouble of keeping all in safety till you hear from me?"

"Of course."

"Where shall you be? They wanted you at Dynely."

"I can't go there. I am in love with solitude just now. I will go to Norwood. It's a fancy of mine, you know. I will tell Letty to come to me, if she likes it. Not that she will. Anything you may write to me can come to this house. I shall send for letters, I suppose. One never feels settled except in one's own place. Is it to-morrow you go?"

"Yes; I shall go to see Jane to-night."

And so the event was got over.

The next day, after luncheon, they stood alone together in the dining-room, silently, for a few minutes. Then a carriage drove to the door.

"Wish me well, Judith," he said, imitating the Trederrick mode of speech, and holding out his hand to her, dropping for the moment his usually stiff and commanding manner. She looked with a quiet eye on his changed face, which immediately trembled with an odd anxiety; she smiled a calm, glorious sort of smile, and the man's nervous face responded quickly to the sunshine of her beauty. She took his hand. "I wish you well, Peter," she said. "I was going to ask you——"

"What shall I do for you?" he inquired, eagerly.

"Not anything for me—but for Letty. You could bring her a set of those amethysts girls wear, you know."

"Can't you buy them here in town?" he asked, the dictating spirit come back to him.

"Oh! yes; only then you would not bring them for her."

"Well, I don't know—I'll see about it. But it would save trouble if you got them yourself. Good-bye."

"Good-bye." Their hands met. He seemed almost in too great a hurry to take up his gloves and hat to notice her.

"Good-bye," she said once more. The man-servant was in the room.

"You know I shall write," he said, and turned away.

The tears jumped up into her eyes; but she had no consciousness of where they came from, nor what they meant. Her trembling lip curled into a half derisive half wondering smile at her own loss of self-command. He had left the room with the door open, she walked out and upstairs, and into her own boudoir as the carriage was driving away. Then she sat down and wept bitterly.

She granted herself this great relief without asking herself why she wanted it; but vague thoughts of Sophy happy with one whose goodness crowned him with what was equal to perpetual youth; hazy recollections of a day when all this had been hoped for, pined for, by herself, and lost before she had really known that it had indeed been offered to her—these things made her weep, and such weeping blessed her. She was hanging up her wreaths of withered memories, and it could not be done without tears; but she kept all anger out of her heart. She said that the time for anger was over. Her heart's temple, but for those withered memories, was a vacant empty shrine. She sat there alone, and lonely beyond all description. Her one real friend, Sir James Luxton, given away, possessed by another—gone. Her daughter she had given away too; denied herself any part in her, lest she should become a memory defiled by contention; yet Letty had been longed over with all the irrepressible longing of a mother's heart. She had done violence to herself in this matter, but she had done wisely, she knew. Letty's life would have been less happy than it was if she had acted otherwise. So she had felt and believed. Therefore she had clad herself in the disguise of cold indifference, and never, till the girl lay apparently dying, had

she betrayed the warmth that lay within. But she could never have done hoping that she should get Letty for her own one day; and the only way of accomplishing this was, she thought, to get her married to Hugo. "I should make both of them love me then," she said in her meditations, and so hoping she wrote to Letty the letter which has been read.

Her hero, however, had other thoughts, and was then riding with Colonel Penwarne and talking of them.

These two men were the greatest possible friends, and likely to continue so, notwithstanding their disagreements as to Alice; for disagreements they had. Colonel Penwarne, the older and ever successful hero, talked sublimely of conquering fate; and Hugo, who had suffered shipwreck in that poetical barque which has youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm, was more in the disposition to submit to loss, and make the best of it.

"I shall be very sorry to part with you; very sorry to see you go back to India, we not being there. Yet, the thing offered to you is an honour—I feel that. I am myself grateful for all good done to you. But I say once again to you, Hugo—stay at home."

"If I stayed at home, I should learn what Despair means."

"Why, you are despairing now, are you not?" asked the Colonel, with a happy twinkle in his eye, brought there by a sudden hope.

"I did not mean the despair of a lover," said Hugo gravely. "I *quite* despair about Alice. I have done violence to myself at your kind instigation, and kept near her, and again got, to some degree, into her life. But she is not to be won. She is very odd to me, very often. If I were to stay at home I should learn a worse despair than a lover's; I should despair as a man; I should despair of life."

"How?" asked Colonel Penwarne briskly.

"There is a despair that quashes life. I have had a sort of vision of what my be—

'The agony, the desolation,
The feeling up and down creation,
For thy dark door, annihilation.'

That is what may be. It won't do, you know. The love that dropt out of my life—what a loss it was! I have never

seen the smallest sign of relenting on Alice's part. Perhaps if I were to say to her what I have now said to you, she would marry me. But as I have always said, I don't want that. I want what I thought I had, the love for love; I had it before we came home. Ah, what a loss it was! I have been counting the cost of it ever since. It never gets counted out. It is a bad habit. It might bring me to the longing after 'thy dark door, annihilation.' The only cure is work; the only thing for me is to go and get it. Work is the great physic for human woe. Work, work! I believe in it. I have consulted the learned, too. I asked Mrs. Ferris her opinion as to work—'Blessed, 'tis the most spiritual thing in life, next to saying your prayers!' and Hugo laughed; but Colonel Penwarne did not laugh.

"You have been as a son to me," he said. "We have always loved you as our own. You have always given me the open-heartedness that fathers prize. But now I see how it is. I have no encouragement to give you as to Alice. I ought to say 'go.' I do say so. Hugo, my dear boy, go away; go back to active life. There are good girls on earth who are not called Alice."

"Perhaps," laughed Hugo; "but I don't feel sure. However, I can go off upon the discovery."

"Yet—yet," it seemed very difficult for Colonel Penwarne to let his adopted son go. "Have you made the most of your chances? Have you not been as it were—as it looked—dull, even indifferent in the matter?"

"I can't tell. Perhaps it has seemed so sometimes. Light purposes quickly find light words. I have had too deep a meaning to keep the expression of it on the tip of my tongue always. Any return of tenderness from her I should have felt fast enough. Her love is all I ever wanted. I want her to love me," said Hugo.

He could never get this want out of his mind; and it would come out in his great sincerity, and describe itself simply. *I want her to marry me*, would not have expressed what he felt. He had known this from the first; and he was undoubtedly nervous about Alice being pressed to reconsider his suit. He was quite alarmed at the idea of being consulted over, and talked about, and praised, and offered to her, and finally accepted as a man too good to lose. If she could only have come him as she had so often done in her infant years, before she could speak plainly, and said, "Don't leave me Hugo." If such a glorious moment

could come to him now! Had she not been in all his life. What had he ever been in love with before he loved her? It was not like the loves of other men. They might always have been choosing, changing, persevering, prevailing—at last the right thing coming, and all other thoughts forgotten. But this love had been the *one* love; beautiful, stedfast, approving itself more and more to his judgment.

Had it not been Alice's happiness as well as his own? Had *he* ever treated *her* with caprice? Hadn't he always been faithful, glad, and thankful? Had he not waited only till she was old enough to answer from her own experience of herself when he should say "Come." Had she not told him to go, and come back if he liked it; and that she would not break her heart if he married some one else?

In this way the argument was always being stated by Hugo's vexed disappointed heart. So, when he and Colonel Penwarne came in from their ride, it was a settled thing that Hugo was to go. "I shall tell Mrs. Penwarne," said the Colonel, "but I shall not tell Alice till we have got this Dynely visit over. I think that best."

"I leave it all to you," said Hugo.

Then, when Colonel Penwarne told Jane, his wife, that woman grieved greatly; but she was faithful to her first determination that Alice must marry as she pleased. Yes, nothing in life could ever compensate a woman for not marrying with a perfect love. "The girl must please herself," she said through her tears. "I could never discover to any one else my great disappointment. Oh, Arthur!"

And then they comforted each other, sitting side by side in the little back drawing-room in Davis's Hotel, which had been artfully changed into a kind of bower of geraniums and oleanders for their benefit.

Colonel Penwarne praised Hugo.

"Yes," said his wife, jealous of any one being praised in his presence, even by himself—"yes, Hugo is delightful. But who has he to thank for that? You are not among the aged yet, but you might say, as the white-bearded Phoenix said to Achilles—

'Great as thou art, my lessons made thee brave;
A child I took thee, but a hero gave.'"

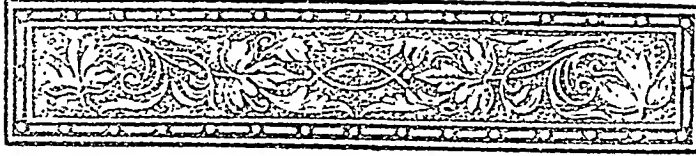
"Ah," he answered her, "if I had not taken you too soon
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from Frederrick, Jane, you would, under Peter's care, have been able to quote Homer to me in the original."

"Poor Peter!" she laughed happily. They had forgotten Alice and Hugo too, these tender souls. "Poor Judith too! What a freak of his is this going to Berlin! He said he might go to Dresden. And Judith is quite alone. Shall we send and offer ourselves for the evening? I am so glad to have got over all my first strange feelings towards her."

"Yes; but I always admired her," said Colonel Penwarne, smiling. "As to your youthful prejudices, they are mere memories now."





CHAPTER XXXV.

QUESTIONS.

Or real pains, or those which fancy raise,
For ever blot the sunshine of my days.—R. WEST.

"**C**OME as an aide-de-camp," said Hugo, walking into Lady Judith's presence that evening. "I am to say from my superiors that they will wait upon you this evening, if you are quite alone."

"Delightful!" exclaimed the lady. "I hope you are not expected to return with a message?"

"I am not expected. If you could not see them—only, in that case, I promised to return."

"And now you and I are to have a tête-à-tête."

"As you please. But I can go, and return at nine, when they will arrive."

"It would be too uncivil. Please to sit down."

Hugo obeyed. He had no objection now, in view of his soon leaving for India, and in expectation of a good appointment which had been offered to him there, to have a friendly talk alone with Lady Judith.

He had not begun by liking her. She had never from the first, even when he had been in those long-past holidays at Coombe with Marian Teague and little Alice, had any fancy for him. But, in his manhood, after his long absence in India, after his youthful and distinguished career there, after her own boy's death, she had begun to think of him, to study him, to watch his ways and listen to his conversation, and she had grown to value him very much. She would have liked a son to match him. She longed to make him her son by marrying him to Letty.

"Sit down," she said. "Hugo Penwarne, I have something to say to you. I have burnt that bad book."

"Thank you," he said very quietly.

"Why, you ought to be charmed, flattered—you ought to praise me. How dull you are!"

"I thanked you. I think thanks are better than the self-sufficient fooleries you suggest. And why should you be praised?"

"And why should you thank me?" she asked sharply.

"Because you have done something towards preserving one woman's mind from greater contamination than it had already received."

"Whose mind?"

"Your own."

"And is the state of that mind any concern of yours?"

"Lady Judith, I dislike this sort of examination. If you can't be pleasanter I will go away."

"You are so unlike other people."

"I don't believe it. You speak from your ignorance," interrupted Hugo.

"Well, *I* find you so different. It may be knowledge or ignorance—no matter which—that to get at your opinions is particularly—particularly——"

"Go on, please."

"Amusing, I think," said Lady Judith.

"You are too bad," he said, laughing.

"Nevertheless, I burnt the book," she repeated, "and I want my question answered. Is the state of my mind any concern of yours?"

"It is the business and the interest of every man worthy of being called a man to keep every woman's mind, as far as his power and influence allow, innocent and pure. I think that book is the worst I ever read. In my boyhood I read, not all, but too much. In my manhood I began to read it again; but I burnt it, as you did. You see, we are *one*. Now, enough. Are you going to be agreeable?"

She laughed and looked at him, holding some pretty work in her fingers, and glancing at him with a face all over smiles, as he sat almost in front of her by her velvet table.

"Please to begin," he said pleadingly, and she laughed again.

"We have only half an hour more, Hugo." She held out her hand to him. "Take my hand." He took her

beautiful hand, still very beautiful, though in the hand age shows soonest. "Never mention to any one what I am going to say. I depend on your honour. I am going to tell you the great wish of my heart. Oh! Hugo, could you not love Letty?"

He kissed her hand, and let it go.

"No, dear Lady Judith."

"It is the great wish of my heart. It would give me so much happiness. My son would be alive again; my daughter would return to my breast, where she has never been since she could read and write. I think my desert life would bloom once more; and is she not what any man might love?"

"Any man—not I," he answered. "Mr. Drake once spoke to me—I hope you never——"

"No, no; it is not easy to believe in great blessings. This would be *such* a blessing! You can't dislike her, Hugo."

"I admire her very much."

"You surely can't love any one else? I never feared about any one but Alice, and you are not going to marry her."

"No," whispered Hugo,

"Belton will marry her. It will all be settled now at Dynely. He has told his father and mother. Alice herself cannot possibly be ignorant of his meaning. If she did not mean to accept him, she would not go."

"Very likely," said Hugo.

"Oh! Hugo, you do wrong. You waste life. Tell me—will you tell me honestly?—are you engaged to any woman?"

"No, no."

"And you are not angry with me for asking you!"

"Oh! no."

"Then I say you do wrong. Time, youth, manhood, are the treasure of life to you *now*. Time, in years to come, will not be worth the having. The days of youth are precious; make your manhood the perfected thing it ought to be. Don't waste life, Hugo; don't cast aside the good things that are offered to you; don't live on as if life were to be the never-ending, ever-present *now* that youth believes it to be. Make your life while you have the opportunity; think of my child—think of Letty."

"You often say very good things to me, Lady Judith. You

have been saying them now. Did you ever think Letty loved Cecil Carteray?"

Lady Judith dropped her hand slowly in her lap, and rose from her chair. It surprised Hugo; he rose up also. She looked pale as death. He felt frightened for one moment; but she said, quietly, looking across the room to a table in the corner—"Please to bring me that little silver work-box." Then she sat down again, and when he gave her the thing she had asked for, she said calmly, "What made you think of that?"

"A mere trifle. Once, some time since last April, I was bringing Alice down the crag-path—Cecil was helping Miss Drake. We had to wait for them, and it crossed my mind. I think I said so to Alice. Then her illness was so unaccountable. I went to Liverpool to see him. We had been great friends always—in the boy-days, you know. I went, really hoping he might say something, if there was anything to say; for kind chattering friends had been speaking of the marriage of myself and Letty as a sort of poetical way of settling the property."

"Well?" said Lady Judith.

"He had nothing to say. I gave him every chance, I think. He was glad to see me once more, and I escorted Mrs. Carteray back."

"Letty could not have cared for him. I liked him very much. He was almost as great an original as you are. I should have found it out. Letty is heart-whole, Hugo. Her's is a heart worth having, a character worth knowing. I wish you could be brought to give yourself up to that siege; oh dear, oh dear!" She looked at him with a helpless, entreating sort of look. "She would be so happy, so safe—and you—you would be happy. There is not a better girl in the world. It might take you trouble; it might take you time; but she is worth winning. Hugo, try!"

It once occurred to Hugo Penwarne, who admired Letty extremely, and who was not at all the hard kind of man who could be pressed by a beautiful mother like Lady Judith and not feel it, to say—*Give me a little time*. He even thought he might put off going to India, and go to Naples instead, and see what Alice and Lord Belton would do with themselves in his absence. Something whispered in his heart—If she marries Lord Belton, why should you not marry Letty? Of course her going to Dynely means that she will have him. Has not all the world been saying that

he will marry her for nearly a fortnight? He looked at Lady Judith and thought, what a wonderful, interesting, beautiful woman! How kind, how wise, how good! What a story she must have had!

While these thoughts of the woman he loved, and the woman who was tempting him to forget her, were passing across his mind, Lady Judith once more held out her hand. "There, promise me to think the question well over; promise not to take this sweet hope out of my life. I have seen many hopes wither; I have buried many sweet and holy thoughts. One, only one, is left to me, I think; and you can grant my thought and fulfil my hope, if you will. Hugo, you may not know how, how—no, old as I am, I can't say it—you will laugh at me; I mean that you are one of those who would win if they would try. To such as you success always comes, if the man will work for it."

"I take your hand and thank you. Lady Judith, I wish I could believe that I belong, as you would have me think, to the army of irresistibles. A day might come when I might be very thankful to feel that I could win a woman for my wife, good, gentle, beautiful, and a child of yours; but that time is not now—and it is a business I could not go to at any other bidding than that of my own heart. You have a good opinion of me. I will try to act up to it. It does a man good to be well thought of by—by such as you. Now I must go. I think I require a little loneliness to get me into a natural state. I will be back in half-an-hour—*au revoir*." And he was gone.

He went off quickly, got his feet on the turf, and walking briskly, stood soon among the great spreading trees of the most beautiful park in the world. "This is a blessing!" he ejaculated, taking his hat off and sending his glances across to Kensington Palace. "Dutch William knew what he was about. Oh, Alice!" He walked away with his eyes on the ground. "Oh, Alice!"

The name had echoes among the whole of his past. Old scenes came back; the prattling child, the confused blushing girl fidgeting with her gentle hands about his sword knot; the scared creature allowed to come and see him after his first campaign, as he lay just recovered from a terrible wound; the young girl who, breathlessly frightened, saw him go again; the grateful daughter, who had thanked him on her knees, till he took her in his arms, for saving her father's life. Oh, Alice! Could she have forgotten these

things? Could she really ever marry another man, knowing that he loved her? Poor Hugo! He had to sustain himself with certain comforts of most undoubted efficacy, before he felt equal again to encounter Lady Judith, and meet the girl he loved in her presence.

And Lady Judith, as soon as Hugo left, grew pale again at the recollection of what he had said of Letty and Cecil Carteray. A terrible question came to her—Was her own daughter to act her own life over again? The fear quite subdued her for a moment. Then she put it away, with a quick Impossible! and waited for her guests.

They soon came, and Lady Judith received them gaily. They were all so sorry she was not going to Dynely.

No, she said, she could not go. It had been a year, or a summer, of anxiety; and so many things had been feared, and so many escaped from, and so many things had been done too. She wanted rest. She could not rest at Trederrick. To her an entirely different life was an essential part of rest. Norwood had been a blessing to her once before, and such she intended it to be again. "It is a real change. I shall do odd things, they are so resting. I shall go very early indeed to Dover, and see a friend, and watch steam-packets come in, and come home quite late in the evening."

"And would not Dynely be a variety?" asked Alice, who had seen a great deal of Lady Judith during their unexpectedly prolonged absence from Trederrick, and had learned to like her, in a daring sort of way, feeling like a child playing with fire-arms, and half afraid of the new-found skill necessary to the showing off of the weapons.

"No. Dynely would be no variety to me, for I have done it before, often; and no rest, because everything is done on a plan. It is always, however, a very well-arranged thing, and invariably successful. You ought to see it, Alice."

Alice blushed. "What is it like? How does it differ from other country-house entertainments?"

"It is a thing quite by itself. A sort of harvest home, though the corn-fields have long been reaped; a sort of shooting-party, too—it is seldom, or never, before September. A house full of London friends; a ball-room full of country neighbours—the rich, the poor, the tradespeople, the clubs. Lord Dynham is a Forester, a Druid, an Odd-Fellow. It lasts a week; but the first day is the great day. I remember that it begins with, 'When the rosy morn ap-

pearing,' and the Old Hundredth Psalm, and ends with dancing 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' and a dreadful chorus to 'God save the King.'"

"Dear me, how delightful!" laughed Alice. "Is there no other day that you can describe?"

"I don't know how the entertainments come. Indeed, I fancy the succession alters. There is a dinner one day, with speeches and toasts. Colonel Penwarne, are you prepared to return thanks for the army? Another day everybody goes to a ball in the town. Dynely is a very picturesque, and a particularly odd little town. It is a ball where everybody pays for tickets, and the money goes to something—cottage hospitals was the charity when I was last there. And you will meet Mrs. Vellacombe. I declare I almost wish I was going. She has been here lately a good deal, and I have not seen her till now since she married again. She is very pleasant; and we agree charmingly. I believe everything she says; and if there are a great many people like her in existence, I shall see the world well washed and swept before I die, which thing I have long hoped for, but never dared to look forward to."

"Am I to like Mrs. Vellacombe?" asked Alice.

"Use your judgment, and decide for yourself. It will be best for you to like her, certainly, as she is Lady Dynham's sister."

Once more Alice blushed. There had been, a second time, something in Lady Judith's manner which made her uncomfortable. She looked towards her mother and saw that, though her eyes were on the carpet, she was smiling; she looked at Hugo, and Hugo's eyes met hers. He looked away, but Alice felt vexed because she had looked at him, and more vexed because she was sure that he knew what she was thinking about.

Presently Lady Judith rose up, and went into the inner room, telling Alice to come too. When there, she said, "My dear girl, I dislike innuendoes, and little allusions to things are always disagreeable. It is best to tell you that I know of Lord Belton's admiration." She had taken Alice by the hand, and was looking very kindly into her face. "I know. His mother told me, and she added that it was a preference that Lord Dynham and herself quite approved of. He had told them of his hopes. I think she said that you knew of his love."

"Don't, Lady Judith. I do not wish to marry Lord Belton."

"My love!" in a tone of great surprise. "The going to Dynely has no other meaning—if you do know of his love—than your being willing to listen to him."

"I had no idea—I did not think——" Alice was confused and hesitating! "How could I guess that he would ever tell any of them?"

"Not tell his father and mother! Oh, Alice! He is an only son; he would be sure to tell them. He would be equally sure to have their consent to the following out of his own wishes, when, as in this case, his hopes were fixed on a good girl, and a gentlewoman."

"Then it is I that have been wrong. But I did not wish to go to Dynely, and I said so. My mother knew what there was to know. It was an odd, unusual incident."

"But enough to make you aware of his love."

"Yes, I suppose so; pray say no more, Lady Judith. I told my mother."

"Your mother is a baby, Alice; and I am a hard, worldly woman. If it is as you say, your going to Dynely means that you have made up your mind to say 'Yes.' Do remember that. You can see it for yourself, I should think."

"I can see what you mean—and not to go would be best; I see that too—but I *must* go now."

"Well, then, don't be perverse. He is a good match, a very good one; and a very good kind of young man. He was brought up at home, and is certainly no worse for it. You would be a happy woman, and you would have a good welcome into his father's house. I shall expect to congratulate you when you come back." And so saying, she put her hand on Alice's arm and led her back to the room, where Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne were preparing to go.

When the carriage came to the door Hugo would not get in. He preferred walking. "He won't be with me any more than he can help," sighed Alice in her heart. But at that moment there rose the strongest determination in her mind to marry Hugo if she could. But how could she? She knew his nature. It would not do to beg his pardon, and say she had been wrong. He would not like his wife ever to have been in the wrong in such a matter, and with him. He was, so she thought, so faultless in all he said and did, that there was nothing on his part to complain of. To speak to either her father or mother was quite impossible.

To do so to either of them would be a loss of self-respect. Not even Marian Teague could help her. But to live without Hugo in her life, she thought would be impossible. So she harassed herself day after day, and vexed herself night after night, because Hugo was so impracticable.

And Hugo was standing aside to give Lord Belton his chance. "If he loves her, and she likes that better than the old thoughts, why not?"

But Alice gave unflagging attention to the preparations for the campaign at Dynely, "I shall see more of him among many than I can manage here. He seems to make it a point of honour to avoid me. I could seek him there and not attract any observation. Everything shall be settled at Dynely. I will force him to say something. Why not? It is my right; and I will win it if I can. Oh, this poor woman's heart!"

Alice had arrived at the knowledge of a great fact—that no year had ever yet two summers in it. There is a summer season in our lives too—one. It comes as a summer comes to a year of the world, after our spring, before our autumn, and it never comes again. When it bursts upon youth in its brightness, warmth, and glory, its long days with scarcely any—with no true—night, it is always very hard to believe that it is passing away. So youth wastes time dreadfully; it so wishes life to stay just as it is, that it believes what it wishes. Youth goes on wasting, goes on believing in the standing-still of all existence, not knowing that the wasted days, the lost opportunities, will never return. This is what Alice had suddenly found out for herself; but the discovery had filled her with a new energy, with a courage that had lain still till then. She could not let this man drift away from her. If he chose to go, giving her up, on consideration, as the best thing for him to do, then, go he might. But if he loved her he should not go. With all this, no doubt, Alice felt the great truth that sympathy is necessary to a woman. Feeling the love fading out of life she suddenly yearned to love again. How could she stand alone?

She looked round her for woman's weapons. The fine clothes were surveyed with satisfaction; the ornaments carefully chosen by her admiring mother gave her a new interest; the songs she had lately learned, as yet unheard by Hugo, were carefully practised. She went about with an elastic step, a head erect; she was arming herself for conquest, without any real acknowledged sense that she was

doing so ; only she was hungering in her heart for the old life back again, and the old love that had blessed it from the first. All she felt was, "I must conquer him ; he would not like a humble wife—a fawning, seeking woman. And oh ! if I had only a less perfect father and mother ! They are always keeping us asunder—always protecting me from Hugo ; they are so utterly excellent, it is really dreadful !"

So the day of departure came, and Lady Judith went to Norwood, and the Penwarnes left London for their visit to Dynely, on their way home.

Letty had had news almost every day, either from her mother or through Alice. She had kept their neighbours in full information of all facts that were interesting to them ; and after her last drive to Marsland, she strolled out in the evening with Miss Teague to her cottage ; and then, leaving her there, went on to Mrs. Ferris at the farm. She had heard that Geraldine was ill, and not having seen Joe for a few days, she wanted to inquire for her.

She found Mrs. Ferris in her garden.

"Eh, Miss Drake, what a day it has been ! 'Tis a new summer, which is out of nature, and never good for anything. The evening comes with chill these strange days, and Geraldine has suffered terribly, mind and body both wrong."

"I am very sorry. I came to ask for her. We have had no visit from Joe for a week, I think."

"'Tis all along of Joe," said Mrs. Ferris ; "and though but a boy, and a turbulent boy, too, he's very good and clever, and like a man to make up his mind. I correct him often for his boyish ways. He has had trouble enough to be wiser ; for trouble is a schoolmaster, and it is not wise to disregard its teachings. But when his heart is touched, Joe is always right. Now, he has looked forward steadily to this future of his, when his mother shall leave him, and he has worked like any man to get himself fit to go across to Canada, should the time come. They wrote a little while ago to have him now. Geraldine had said that she only lived from day to day, and they had a friend, the captain of a ship sailing from Liverpool this very week, and he offered to give Joe his passage, and they pressed it on her greatly to part with the boy, and see him settled before she died. She troubled herself nearly into her coffin, till I said, 'Put it to the boy himself ;' which she did, and he was like a young giant before her. He refused to leave her. She said they had better ask some other person's judgment. Said Joe, 'Mother,

I don't care for anybody's judgment—I'll go by my heart.' And the boy spoke well. She's been better ever since. But did ever anybody see any one like her? She has got so thin, and pale, and so supernatural bright, I do assure you that sometimes, when I have seen her in the moonlight lately, I can scarcely tell what she's made of."

"Joe was certainly right," said Letty.

"Yes; and have a respect for folk's hearts as long as you live, my dear. The heart is not made of common clay, like feet and hands, you know, though there are those that teach you so, and sin in the saying of it, I tell you. The heart is the ruler. It is the seat, and source, and house of life. Have it in respect; don't poison the source, and keep out of the house all evil things. My dear, the heart is the one thing that we have got of our own to give; keep it sweet and lovely, and forgive an old woman like me; but my age is my excuse, and you are a deal called to stand alone, I know; and so terribly young!" said Mrs. Ferris, looking at her.

"Go on," said Letty, resting her hand on her arm, and looking up into the deeply-lined face that was very pale in the evening light.

"Well, I speak out of my poor thoughts, living in the sight of a dying woman, and in a manner earning my bread. I know that the obedient parts of us are not the worse for work, but that for the heart is the work of worship, because it is the house of love. And I would not have sent Joe away from his mother, and made that boy's heart suffer, not if I had known that he would have been crowned king when he got there, my dear."

Letty walked home pondering. It must be evil to cause sorrow; but it does not follow that it must be evil to suffer, she thought. And with an inward strength allied to a great tranquillity, she grasped with more certainty than ever the meaning of that truth, which had before come to her tenderly, but indistinctly,—that "purification is the joy of pain."





CHAPTER XXXVI.

CROWNED.

And should the gen'rous spirit flow
Beyond where prudence fears to go,
Such sallies are of nobler kind
Than virtues of a narrow mind.



O gayer time had ever come to Dynely. The strange return of summer, though pronounced against by Mrs. Ferris, was there thought a great boon, and welcomed and valued accordingly:

Lady Dynham had achieved all her wishes.

Lady Mary Cleverleigh was there, with her husband and daughter, with the agreeable Mrs. Daubeney too, and Captain Goodman in attendance. Lady Mary had recovered wonderfully, in order to meet the moment wherein Mr. Luxton was to be dismissed. She had done it admirably. She had told him her suspicions as to his want of love for her daughter. It had always been an odd fancy to keep the engagement a secret. He could not tell her that the operation of "drawing off" from Sophy Cereseau had really been done with all reasonable speed, considering its difficulty, and that until that delicate affair was completed, his intentions towards Liza had to be guarded from the public eye. But *he could* tell her that he believed his large and newly-inherited estate in the neighbourhood of their property in Yorkshire had been the chief reason for accepting him, and that, but for the seeming certainty of his inheriting more, he should have been refused. He said it in the angriest manner possible to any intercourse with a lady of quality, and a confirmed invalid; but her immediate languid acquiescence in his statement made him feel in-

stantly, beyond all dispute, that he had had very little else to recommend him, and cast him so suddenly into the dust at Lady Mary's feet, that he had no little difficulty in getting himself out of her presence.

Mr. Luxton had been defeated, and Sophy revenged.

But the pleasantest part was that Lady Mary was reconciled to herself. She had had some qualms of conscience as to Freddy Goodman; but now she set all wrong-doing down to her unfortunate nervousness, and made many pious and comforting statements as to Providence bringing all things right in the end.

Unquestionably the Dynely party would not have been half as brilliant if Liza and Captain Goodman had not been there. It was delightful to Alice to meet them in that exuberant happiness with which they expected everybody to sympathize; and little Liza looked so exceedingly beautiful, and she was so very unlike every one else, that there was no rivalry with anybody. This was one great element in her popularity.

All styles and statures, all tempers and dispositions, united in the admiration which that dainty, daring little scrap of humanity called forth. Captain Goodman's worship of her was open and unceasing, and they trusted each other to the greatest extent; for she did a great deal that, under other circumstances, might have passed for flirting with other men, and he walked off smoking, boating, cricketing, as if he had no ties to anybody. Nevertheless, they had an art which they practised so equally and so harmoniously that they must have learnt it from each other. All he did was to her honour and glory; all she did, without exception, was to his. Their praises were sounding somewhere all day long; and "which is Captain Goodman?" and "Where is Miss Cleverleigh?" were the first questions asked invariably during the week of the fête.

It is scarcely asserting too much to say that the sight and companionship of these perfectly happy people put love-making into everybody's head. Colonel Penwarne laughed with his wife, in the shady alleys where, after their quiet contented fashion, they walked to enjoy themselves in peace. It raised Hugo's spirits visibly. He laughed aloud, and Freddy Goodman thanked him.

Lord Belton said very gravely to Alice:

"Making proper allowances for the difference of people's

dispositions, I should say that it was exactly what it ought to be." Alice agreed with him. "All things considered, I should say that my cousin Sophy has been a blessing in her generation." Again Alice thought as Lord Belton did.

"Her marriage with the uncle made the nephew valueless, nearly, in the matrimonial market."

"I don't believe Liza could ever have married him. She did not know the truth about Captain Goodman."

"I wonder what constancy is?" said Lord Belton.

"I can't think," said Alice.

Her own unwavering determination was to prevent Lord Belton proposing to her. She knew that he intended to ask her again. She felt that in the estimation of the noble family at Dynely she was the heroine of the fête. Many times a day one or other of them made her understand this, only she would not appear to understand it; and she was determined to save Lord Belton the vexation of a refusal.

So it went on. She was perpetually feeling the truth of Lady Judith's words. "You know that he loves; your going there means that you will accept him."

The pleasant, cheerful, but hard and polished manner that she showed to everybody puzzled both Lord and Lady Dynham. "She is a noble creature; a very fine creature; a perfectly elegant creature; accomplished, agreeable, fascinating, and most politely self-possessed; but I can't say I feel as sure of her, my lady, as you do," said that great judge of the gentle sex to his very gentle wife.

"If Belton wishes it he will succeed. She has become more womanly. I don't dislike it. It would do very well; and as Belton admires her, of course I wish for her very much."

"I admire her quite as much as any son could desire. She has about her that respectful sort of self-assertion which never offends—on the contrary, I call it flattering," said Lord Dynham. "I hope our boy will succeed."

"He is the best match going," suggested her ladyship.

"I suspect that she is too good a match herself to be much given to that sort of calculation." And Lord Dynham walked away, leaving his wife a little uncomfortable.

Alice's way with Hugo was a very difficult one. She would get away to the privacy of her own pleasant room, and almost cry because people would be so perfect. Hugo was like a round ball, oiled and polished. There was no getting hold of him. Sometimes she thought she had her

hand on him, but he was gone. As to her father and mother, their conduct was enough to drive her to despair. If Hugo came to where she and her mother were sitting, Mrs. Penwarne would find something for her to do to take her out of his neighbourhood. And sometimes, in a moment of rest, which might have been given to Hugo, she would see him and her mother walk away together, as if they were the lovers; and she would know how earnest their talk was by the little movements of her mother's hand, which she knew so well, and by the bending of Hugo's head as he said something with increased emphasis, or listened with a tender devotion, such as he always used towards Mrs. Penwarne. Once Alice even saw marks of tears on her mother's face as she came on those two unexpectedly, and she felt with a pang of vexation that an account of what they had been saying, invented on purpose and meant to hide the truth, was artfully given to her. And this was true, for Mrs. Penwarne had been talking to Hugo of the departure for India, which could not be many weeks away from them, and she had not been able to restrain her tears.

But Alice had been quite right in thinking that in a crowd, and in a strange house, she could do more to help herself than when alone with her father and mother. Then, at Dynely, she never lost a chance of gaining his approval and exciting his admiration. She dressed, sang, played, danced, talked, and did a thousand acts of graciousness to the world around her for Hugo's sake. She made no excuse to herself; she honestly averred to that secret conscience which was her witness that he deserved it.

"It was as *I* made it once," that inner self whispered; "it shall be as *he* will have it now. If I can't make him admire me, and wish to have me for his wife once more, I must submit to my punishment. But I will win him back again if I can." She became the very spirit of beauty, the central point of attraction in that great assemblage; and among the many who might blamelessly have counted themselves among her equals, she never gave offence, but she succeeded in everything like a woman inspired.

Her father looked on, amazed; her mother, from a distance, observed all with a gentle wonder, and a sort of alarmed admiration; and yet Alice was never other than the most refined of womankind, always protected by that pure and gracious element that surrounds the best of her sex.

"What a success!" said Colonel Penwarne to his wondering wife.

"Oh, dear, yes!" She quite gasped as she spoke.

"Everybody is full of admiration."

"Oh! yes; but the child—the young girl is gone. I have lost something."

"Found something, I should say."

"She is grown older. I told you that that affair with Hugo had made Alice old."

"I think we may be very much obliged to Hugo, then."

Colonel Penwarne was one of the severest judges the fair sex had. He had no toleration for anything unwomanly, but he could see no fault in his child; neither, indeed, were there any faults to find. A great thing was being undertaken by her, and her perfect sincerity in the work raised it to grandeur.

She had let the best thing on earth drop out of her hands in her girlish pride, that could not believe in loss—in her girlish inexperience, that could not realize how great the good was that Hugo had offered to her. So, now that she knew, she played this game of life with her whole future on its success; she would re-capture this man; she would conquer him, and bring him to her feet, and then she would beg his pardon, and tell him the truth.

It was an honest thing to do. It was a good thing to gain. She would work well, and as wisely as she knew how, to that one end, which had grown to be holy in her eyes, and to be sought with a single-mindedness which might be compared to a devotion.

"She is a good girl," meditated her father, as he watched her life, and heard her praises from men and women, old and young—"a very good girl. I wish all that with Hugo could have been rightly managed." In his heart he thought it would have been better to have spoken to Hugo when he first proposed to do so to his wife, and married them off-hand. Then he smiled at the thought, and said to himself—"They would have been very happy, no doubt; but we should never have seen the girl what she is to-day." And in that he was quite right. He could see and appreciate the effect, but he gave no guess at the cause.

Once Alice feared that the catastrophe with Lord Belton would come before she was prepared for it. Lord Belton's work, as the son of the house, was constant and of many sorts. He gave every moment he could steal, or honestly

spare, to Alice, and she know very well that the question was to be asked once more. It was very difficult to treat him as he ought to be treated. If she was everything to everybody, there was no harm in being something to him. He had nothing to complain of, but neither had he anything to dwell upon with a lover's encouraging satisfaction.

He had found her once resting and sheltering in a quiet corner, with a sketch-book in her hand, and he had thrown himself on the grass by her side.

"Do you think it a good thing to do all this?" he asked.

"Of course. It is a good thing to give pleasure."

"Always?" he inquired, with emphasis.

"Yes, always. When you can give pleasure without doing wrong, give it. It seems to me that pleasure is the only thing that money can't buy."

"Pleasure is costly enough sometimes—I should say generally."

"It is a good thing for those who have money to spend some in buying it—buying it for other people, I mean. But pleasure, even as a gift, is often independent of money."

"Give an instance, please."

"Well; on the first of last May, the villagers came a-Maying to Coombe; my mother, Marian Teague, Hugo, and I sang madrigals to them. It gave an immense amount of pleasure. We stood out on the lawn, near the laburnums, and the effect was magnificent."

"But May-day comes but once a year. I am not quite a believer yet. I want more facts," said Lord Belton.

"You know Geraldine Graham. All her pleasure is from costless attentions."

"That's charity," he said.

"But not the charity that means silver and gold. She is not poor. She wants what her money will not buy, and she gets it."

"Nevertheless it is charity."

"Nevertheless she gets pleasure; and it is of pleasure we were speaking."

"Still I don't like charity," said Lord Belton. "I don't want to be, in any sense, an object of charity. I have a repugnance to it."

"Hush! You don't know what you are saying."

"Yes, I do. I like love best. With me the bigger flame puts out the less."

"Charity is the bigger flame," said Alice; "its light is universal. It is love. There is no other love by whose light we reach to the farthest limits of this asking world." And immediately, somehow, before he was aware, Alice had risen from her seat, and was asking him to hold her parasol while she fastened the strings of her drawing block. She was so at ease with him that he felt almost abashed.

"I think our conversations are what people call *serious*," said Lord Belton, smiling.

"I like your talking very much," said Alice.

"And we certainly do sometimes get down into things. It is pleasant. Any one else could ask you if you keep those great geraniums out of doors through the winter; or if you play croquet; or if you have ever spent a winter on the Riviera; or if you remarked the brightness of the stars last night. I might ask you how many planets are visible, but, unluckily, I know all these things beforehand. We are too well acquainted to talk prettily, you see, and lest we should drop into the silence of despair, we talk morality."

"I am not in despair," said Lord Belton, gaily; and Alice was near enough to a pretty group of wandering maidens to venture on a laugh.

It was a harder matter to talk to Hugo. The hardest thing in her life was to get him to talk at all. But he had watched her gravely, even sadly; with astonished admiration, he had watched her, and if Alice had not actually seen it, she had known it and felt it; and she had rejoiced over it, and calculated upon it. She had grown so strong in her self-possession that she had arrived at the almost impossible perfection of treating him as if nothing had happened—nothing more, that is, than the blooming of the girl into the woman.

The day of the great ball in the little town of Dynely had come. It had been talked of all the week. It had been prophesied about as certain to be the best that had been known these ten years. Alice felt perfectly sure that it was to be the great day of her life. It had got very difficult to keep off Lord Belton. It seemed once to be quite impossible. It was the evening before the day of this well-omened ball, and he had seated himself by her where, in the large drawing-room, there seemed to be a place almost entirely screened off from observation. She had gone there intending to make her mother come to her, but Lord Belton

secured the seat, and Mrs. Penwarne felt that she did her duty best by staying away herself, in spite of Alice's inviting gestures, and keeping Hugo by *her* side. Her father and mother were a perpetual difficulty to Alice. Their conduct continued to be so perfect; she declared again and again, it was getting more unbearably dreadful every day. But now she was caught in her own snare, and Lord Belton was by her side.

"What dances will you give me to-morrow?" he asked.

"Oh, I can't make engagements now, I have not my card."

"I have brought you one." He produced a lovely little enamel case, which held the useful little tablet. "I invented it, and had it made on purpose. Please to admire it."

"It is beautiful. I really do admire it. Do you mean that you designed it all—that beautiful miosotis wreath, and that place for the name?"

"All," he said, with a laugh.

"You must not make light of it. It is very well done."

"Then take it, please."

"What do you mean?"

"I had it done for you. We are cousins. You may accept it, you know."

"I won't accept it," she said; "but I won't quarrel with you for offering it, because you knew that I wouldn't take it. And because we are, in some way very convenient at this moment, as you say, cousins. Cousins are never offended with each other, are they?"

"Cousins may make each other very unhappy, though."

"I never make people unhappy. I don't approve of it. Neither do you, I am sure. It would be contrary to our convictions on the subject of giving pleasure. Please to remember our conversation of the other morning, and don't have anything over to do with being unhappy; you'll be an object of charity if you don't take care. But, seriously, if you like to dance the third with me, I am quite sure to remember it."

"Why not the first?"

"The first? Why, you will dance the first with Lady Lingsby, and the second with Liza. I believe I ought to come the sixth or seventh—which shall it be?"

"Oh! Alice," he said, "choose me, take me as you like—I'll be faithful!"

"Lord Belton!"

"I must say it again one day. You know I must."

"You have nothing to say now, except as to what dance I am to keep for you."

"I submit for the present," he said, rising up. "The third, then."

"Will you ask my mother to spare Hugo to me?" she said. "I have something to say to him."

He walked away, and he stayed talking to Mrs. Penwarne, while Hugo crossed the room to Alice.

There was no embarrassment in his manner, nor any in hers. She looked sublimely beautiful, he thought, as that gentle look overspread her face, which he had observed there lately when she spoke to him.

"People are asking me to fix my dances for to-morrow. As Sophy Cereseau is not here—is not in existence, in fact—are you going to dance it with me? Captain Goodman comes second, Lord Belton third."

"Thank you," said Hugo.

"Are you very much obliged to me?"

He was silent. She raised her eyes straight to his face. She said, "I should like to be answered."

"For what?"

"For all I have been to you; from the time when I was a baby in your boy-life, to this night, when I have promised you the first dance at the ball. Hugo, I have thought so much of our life together lately—has it been good or bad, I wonder? Are you very much obliged to me, or not?"

"I could neither answer you here, nor—nor anywhere else, I fear."

"But I want to know."

"Why?" He was fighting against her now in his heart.

She paused. "For my own life's sake, I suppose," she said. But in saying this *she* was not fighting him. She only knew—knowing the man she had to deal with—that she must not throw herself on his mercy. She must in some way conquer him before she confessed.

"It is not a subject," he said, very stiffly, "on which I can speak with so much indifference."

"Are you angry? You ought not to be displeased. And you ought not to talk of indifference to me."

He gave a little bow, and was silent.

"I can't let you go away till we have said more. I don't want to have any vexation between us. You have set me an example of indifference, and I have felt it very much. I

don't complain." He sat down by her side; he had been standing till now. "I say I don't complain, because it may be that a man brought up so much with a woman as you have been with me, may lose that sense of respect towards her, which she can't help missing, and which she can't do without."

"No man alive ever felt more respect for a woman, was ever willing to give her more homage than I have felt—than I have asked to give to you. You know it."

"Do I? When did you make it known to me?"

"Have you forgotten what passed between us on the wooden bridge—when you ruined my life?"

She opened her beautiful eyes wide, and looked at him. "I remember thinking you were quite as much engaged with the kingfisher as you were with me." And now she rose up, and moved away, leaving the gentle echoes of her voice in Hugo's heart, which was beating wildly, with he knew not what emotions; anger, surprise, hope, fear—what was it? Five minutes after her silvery voice was flowing forth, filling the room in a duet with her mother. He felt as if he should lose his senses if he stayed there any longer. He got up and went into another room. He tried to get away. He could not go. He came back again. Again he went away—this time through the hall, and out into the open air. There he saw Colonel Penwarne.

"My dear friend, Alice has said—has said strange things. There may have been some great mistake."

"Oh, Hugo!" The words came forth from Colonel Penwarne's lips as if they welcomed a reprieve from death.

"But I can't speak to her. I want you to speak. I want you to ask her if she loves me."

"Hugo," said the grand-looking soldier, putting his hand on the young man's arm, "no man has a right to ask that question except in one way. I could not take so great a liberty with any woman. I will ask Alice if she loves you, provided you commission me to preface it with the information that you love her."

"Well, say so," said Hugo. "But if she disappoints me now, I shall die of it this time; but you need not say *that*, you know."

The little low laugh that trembled on Colonel Penwarne's lips it was a joke to hear.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

ALLEGIANCE.

Whatever has been writ, whatever said,
Of female passion feigned, or faith decayed,
Henceforth shall in my verse refuted stand,
Be said to winds, or writ upon the sand.—Pirron.

THAT night Mrs. Penwarne told her daughter to come to her dressing-room. "Your father wants to speak to you," she said. Alice made no hesitation, but turned aside immediately with her mother.

In the brightest of little boudoirs, a charming place, which belonged to the rooms opposite to Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne, that gentleman stood, looking decidedly majestic, as he occupied its centre in full evening costume, and with a face which "meant serious business," as Alice said in her heart, without a moment of flinching from the *something*, whatever it was, which she saw was impending.

"My dear Alice," began Colonel Penwarne, surveying her, in her rich garments, and remarkable beauty, with an air of great respect, "some months ago Hugo Penwarne asked you to be his wife, and you refused him."

"Yes, papa."

"In fact, you did not then wish to marry him."

"No, papa."

"Do you wish it now?"

"Who has put such a question into your mouth? If Hugo has told you to ask that of me, I can honestly say that I would not marry so presuming, so coarse-minded a man, for the world."

"I ask it, Alice."

"No, no," she laughed beautifully, a sweet, merry, mischief-making, disbelieving laugh.

"I ask it, because the man is so in love with you that he ought to find mercy at your hands, if you have any to show. But the question is a necessary question. He so loves you that he would die for you if necessary; but he wants your love in return. He would not marry you if you were not sure that, on your side, to be his wife would fulfil the real desire of your heart."

"Oh! how like Hugo!" she cried.

"He wants your heart, Alice."

"If he had any common-sense he would know that no one else ever had it," she said, bravely, and yet with a quivering lip, as she saw her mother clasp her hands softly, as if in thanksgiving.

"You nearly lost him, then let me tell you," said Colonel Penwarne. "He goes to India again in a few weeks."

"Well, I don't care," said Alice. She spoke so hardly Colonel Penwarne could not make it out.

"Alice, that night up among the pines I thought you did not care for him."

"That night among the pines I thought it very pleasant to have the power of choice; to be a woman free and able to choose; to stand in your strength, and believe it was my own; to get out of the childish captivity to the law of custom, and out of the bondage to recognized facts. I, like all women, I suppose, wished to make my own life, and to escape from that state of mere vegetation which allows of a girl being transplanted from the house of her father to the home of a husband as a thing that, by the mere force of circumstances, was to be. I wished to clear off the past, to stand alone in my woman's world, and feel free to choose my place. Well, I chose Hugo. What could any man desire better than to be so chosen? And yet he could not see it; neither did he ever try to induce me to choose him again. He has been cross, and proud, and self-occupied——"

"Stop, my love. He desires me to say he loves you with great devotion."

"Let him show it, then. He has avoided me, left me to others, refused me any more than the commonest civility. He walks with my mother. He follows in your footsteps like a dog."

"Oh! hush, Alice!—that might have been my fault—our fault, I mean," said her mother.

"We thought," said her father, "that to save you from

his presence would be our most perfect way towards you, dear child."

"Oh, father!" she cried, with a wail in her voice which made him start, "there are ways revealed to us in which to walk is to be perfect; but I have been thinking lately that to walk in *our own* ways, and to rule other people's lives by *our own* laws, is not perfect."

"That is a great truth," he said softly, and with a faltering voice, "but your mother and I acted for the best."

"And helped Hugo to break my heart," she said, with the tears trembling in her eyelashes. "Oh! father, it is so good to be free, and truthful, and plain-spoken! We have never been free since that morning—when—when I did right—did right, though I have repented of it—did right, though I have in my sorrow called it pride, and accused myself of arrogance."

"Tell me all," said Colonel Penwarne—"would you mind telling it before Hugo?" he said.

He scarcely waited for her gesture of assent. He opened the door of his dressing-room, and called Hugo from the arm-chair where he was sitting, staring at an article in the last *Quarterly*, without knowing the meaning of any sentence in the page. He came into the room, and Alice went to meet him. He was white and trembling. He did not know what to say, and he had no power of guessing at what he might hear.

Alice went on as if she had never made any pause:

"If I had loved him all my life, and valued him above every man, was I wrong to wish to make sure that he must so love and so value me? That morning another wife had been offered to him, with the certainty, as it seemed—Uncle Drake being so much younger than you, father—of a great inheritance—an inheritance which ought to have been his by right. Were these things no temptations? Might they not have tempted a good man? Was I wrong, having given so much—was I wrong to make sure that his love could withstand even that temptation? Was Hugo right to feel that, without any proof, without any previous word ever having been said to pledge us, his love—just because it was his—must pass unquestioned—must instantly be felt to be above all temptation, either from such a woman as Letty, or such wealth and position as belongs to Trederick? If I was arrogant and self-seeking, was I alone in those things?—if I was insolent, what was he? Since then, has

he ever worked to win me? Has he not treated me steadily as one who was cold, unkind, and unjust?—has he not placed himself for ever in the character of the injured one?—and did I ever do more than assert my woman's rights? If I am worth having, I am worth finding; if I am worth winning, I am worth seeking," she said.

"Oh, my dearest, you are right," exclaimed Hugo. "But we all tried to take such care of you—I—I—I have been very wretched, Alice." He held out his hand to her; a strange mistiness seemed to gather about Colonel Penwarne's sight; as to his wife, she looked like one in a trance, waiting for this to end and give her life back to her.

"Wretched!" repeated Alice; "and what might I have been? I have been driven to fight for my life——"

"And conquer," said Hugo.

"Let it be the first and the last victory," she answered.

"It is the only one I could ever wish to win."

Colonel Penwarne led his wife from the room.

"We can only give you ten minutes," he said; "it is getting late."

The time named was quite enough. Those two hearts had found their rest.

"But oh, this going back to India!" exclaimed Mrs. Penwarne, when she came back.

"Dear mother, it will be so nice," said Alice. "I shall like it of all things."

Through all the next day the secret was kept. The ball was the most delightful ball that ever was known. Liza was the fairy of that fanciful scene, for the new-fashioned love of decoration had been allowed to exercise itself upon this "long room" of the old Inn, and to run into the most surprising excesses, and yet Alice was declared to be the queen of the night.

Captain Goodman, who thought he had discovered a secret at Coombe, was delighted to see everything "all right" again. He, being a man who imparted his thoughts, and shared his pleasures with an almost amusing liberality with his neighbours—he turned to Lord Belton and said—"It's comfortable, isn't it, to see Hugo Penwarne all right again? *That* got wrong, you know, once. No one told me, but I saw it. They were talking of this very ball; but never mind—if that is not announced to-night, it will be known in another twenty-four hours. I shall never keep silence through all that time. I am going to dance with

Alice—oh, I beg pardon, Miss Penwarne. You know my acquaintance has dated from four years old, but I don't approve of the familiar system, never did, it's beneath a gentleman—I was saying that I shall take the freedom of one who knew her mother before she was born, look imposingly like a patriarch, and wish her joy."

"Oh," said Lord Belton. It was an eloquent "Oh." Any other man's ears would have heard something in it; but Fred Goodman's eyes and ears too were at that moment given to Liza with the most perfect faithfulness, she having just finished dancing, and he having, without waiting for any reply to his speech, rushed off to be by her side.

"Such a charming ball!" How many fair ladies said so; how many capital partners echoed the fact, with the addition—"but too soon over."

All things have an end; even the Dynely ball came to an end at last with the night that had been devoted to it; and the happy spirits, male and female, laughed to see the morning light, and went home to be in bed all day. But Alice found a moment to say to Mrs. Penwarne, "Mother, I am very happy; oh, so happy, mother! And though I braved it out till I had got him again, I have begged his pardon now." She burst into a torrent of tears.

"Is that your way of being happy, darling?"

"Yes, it is mother. I feel the danger, now it is past; I know the risk, now that it is over. I am the happiest woman in the world, but I must shed tears, they bless and strengthen me. I think it is, somehow, giving thanks."

It was a night to be remembered. And it was remembered beyond Dynely, away at Coombe, and through all Trederick.

There had been in the afternoon a catch of fish beyond all memory of living man for quantity; and that night, while the star-light seemed to turn the living treasure into flowing silver, as it was poured from basket to boat, many stood out to watch the wonderful scene, and, under the silent stars, to thank God.

Miss Teague and Letty had been out till evening. They had wandered off to the extreme end of that point of land that jutted out into the sea from Trederick, where they could watch the boatman, see their work, hear their voices, and join in the general gladness. Then enjoying the air, fragrant with the breath of evening passing across the planted steep in front of the house, saying very little, and

feeling the peace of the hour, and the happy influence of glad hearts so near, they walked towards home.

"We have been out all the day, I think. I hope you are not tired, Letty," said Marian Teague. "Can you go up the crag-path, or shall we stop here"—they were standing in front of Trederrick—"and order the pony carriage."

"It is so mild and lovely. I delight in these still soft evenings. They are found nowhere else in the world, I believe," said Letty. "There is the old gardener. Yes; let us have the carriage. We can wait for it here."

The man came up to them and began to talk; another appeared, and he was sent to the stables with the order for the carriage.

"Have you heard from master, Miss Drake?" asked this old gardener, "if I am not making too bold to inquire."

"I have not heard from him. I heard from my mother yesterday; he had got safely to his journey's end, and said he should soon fix the day for his return."

"I sent my lady her flowers this afternoon; I hope she enjoys them. Might I ask Miss Teague whether 'tis all true about Miss Alice?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Lord Belton's man—you know he is own sister's child to Marchant Gedds—writes that the rejoicings are very grand at Dynely; and that Miss Penwarne is surely marked for his lordship."

"Oh, you know more than we do. We have never heard any news so great as that."

"It need not be beyond truth, though," said the old servant, stroking his silver hair.

"Of course not; people are always going to be married, ain't they?"

The little laugh that this produced was checked by the arrival of the pony carriage. "Oh, Miss Teague, I beg your pardon, but there was a foreign letter directed to you to this place, and we sent it up to Coombe just now."

"Oh! Thank you"—they were driving away.

"That put it into my head to ask about the Squire. Your servant, Miss. Good night."

"A foreign letter; and for me? I am all impatience. I am glad we have not to walk. Drive faster, please. A foreign letter; how odd!"

They got to Coombe and saw the letters on the library

table. Miss Teague, feeling oddly, took hers in her hand. "Letty, light a taper please; how dark it is in the house!"

"Look at the signature. Who is it from?" asked Letty.

"My dear! Give me the candle. Letty, sit down. It is from Desirée d'Antoine. Now, listen. She has seen your father; he is not well. He is very ill, Letty; and some one must go to him directly."

Miss Teague did not believe in the efficacy of breaking bad news gently to people. She did not believe that a long increasingly painful application of torture was the best preparation for any trouble, whether of body or mind. She sat down by Letty, and gave her Desirée's letter to read. It was very short, and perfectly to the point. It allowed of no uncertainty.

"I live here," she wrote, from a country place some twenty or thirty miles from Berlin. "I am still Desirée d'Antoine, having married a far-away cousin, a medical man. He has been called in to attend at our public hotel a man very ill; in serious danger, you are to understand—Mr. Peter Drake. He must be the brother of my once darling pupil, our beautiful Jane. So it struck me at once. I made myself known to him. I have helped to nurse him. At my husband's command I told him of his state; he said 'Write, write.' I asked 'To whom?' He seemed puzzled. I said, 'Have you Miss Teague?' He answered quickly, 'Yes, yes, Marian Teague. Frederrick.' By this I know you are living, and at the beautiful old place. You will know what to do; whom to send. But do not be deceived. He is very ill. Some one must come directly. He is quite alone."

That was the letter.

"I must go—I think we must go," said Miss Teague, looking in Letty's face, knowing all she had been to her father, and seeing that history written there.

"Yes, we must go; let us go," said Letty, trembling and tearful. "What does 'very ill' mean, I wonder? We must go at once. We must see my mother."

"How strong are you?"

"Strong enough for this. Not strong enough to be left behind," said Letty.

"Then sit still. No—take off your hat, and go and eat. There is a grand supper, or tea, laid in the dining-room. Letty, you must understand this, now, and through life—if

we would do good, we must keep well. There is no merit in breaking down. If we are to do your father any good, we must keep our minds and bodies in a proper state for work. Once for all—are you understanding me?—once for all, let me say what there may be no proper moment for saying again—what is wanted is work, not sentiment; work, not self-destruction. Self-sacrifice, perhaps; but to have something to sacrifice you must keep body and mind alive and well."

"Thank you." Letty took Miss Teague's hand, and Miss Teague kissed her.

"Then you can go with me. I will get the book with the trains and steam-packet times. Make tea, if you please."

In half an hour they were sitting together again.

"We must sleep here—that is, we may sleep till four o'clock in the morning. We can get to London by the middle of the day. We can go on to Norwood; we can get on by the through-train. You will find that you can sleep wherever you please, and whenever you like, if you eat and drink in your usual way, and keep quiet."

"I am glad we are to go by ourselves," said Letty; "any one else would be in the way."

"Yes. Now go to bed."

Letty obeyed. All her life had been changed in a moment. The steadiness of years beyond her age seemed to have fallen on her. There neither was time for fear nor grief. There was only time for thought and action. In a certain number of hours she should see her father. Out went her heart to that hour. All between had to be borne with, and gone through, for the sake of seeing him, watching him, hearing his voice, receiving his welcome, helping him back to health, and bringing him home to Trederrick. With a quiet strength, which Marian Teague inwardly admired, Letty did all that was to be done, and never gave way for a moment.

Once more she said—"I wonder what *very ill* means?"

"You never know what any expression means, my dear," said her friend, "until you know the person who uses it. I have not seen Desirée for more than twenty years; perhaps I do not know her now. But if she had written that when I did know her, I should have said that, from her pen, it meant a great deal."

"And it is of no use to trouble about its meaning," said Letty; "that is what we are going to see."

The day dawned, and the travellers were gone.

Marian Teague had written a note to Mrs. Penwarne to say they were both going to Lady Judith, and intended to go on to Berlin. They had had a letter to say Mr. Drake was ill, and wanted some one near him.

Then, about one o'clock, they walked into the house occupied by Lady Judith at Norwood. She rose to meet them, looking very ill, wrapped up in shawls, with a scared face. "Oh! tell me what has happened?"

She tenderly embraced her daughter; she wrung Miss Teague by the hand. Miss Teague told her everything, and showed to her Desirée's letter. No leave was asked as to Letty's going. Miss Teague asserted as a fact that it was best for her to go, and right, and that therefore she was going.

"Well, your plan is the best. I am struck down with a frightful cold. Peter will like you there. Oh! Letty; oh! my dear child!" And Lady Judith gave way to a burst of tears.

There was but little time for what they had to do. Before long, had any one looked into a certain carriage of a railway train rushing away to Dover, they might have seen a marvellously beautiful, dark-haired girl, sound asleep, wrapped up in furs in a corner, and a very sad-faced woman looking at her steadily. The steadfast gaze was satisfactory; it relaxed; the strained eyes were shut, the hard face softened, and Marian Teague, tired, willing to rest, sank back fatigued, and, like Letty, slept till the end.

But there was no rest for Lady Judith. She grew feverish; she was really ill; she longed for the one friend of her life, Sir James Luxton, and he was not to be had. She was displeased with herself for not having insisted on Miss Teague taking a servant; she fretted because she could not remember every word of Desirée d'Antoine's note. Her life seemed to have closed in all round her, and she felt like a caged lioness, rebellious, despairing, robbed of all power, and ready to go mad at the fear of what was to happen next.

The doctor had to be told that her husband was very ill, and that she could not go to him.

He was sympathizing, and humanely sorry for her.

"I did wrong," she said to him, "to let them go alone. There is only one person now who could help me."

"Let me telegraph for him. You are too ill to suffer unnecessary irritation."

"Yes," she said, with sudden composure—"yes; please to telegraph to Dynely for Hugo Penwarne."

The necessary information was given, and the thing was done.

After the day of rest following on the ball, when everybody, late in the afternoon, was beginning to collect in groups in the house, on the lawn, and about the gardens, there was no Hugo to be seen. He was gone. Sudden business had taken him to London.

Only to Colonel Penwarne did he show the telegram—"Lady Judith is ill, and has had bad news from Berlin. Please to come to her, and be prepared to go to Mr. Drake."

He was gone in less than half an hour; one farewell to Alice, one to Mrs. Penwarne—that was all that detained him.

"And we will begin our journey home to-night," said the Colonel. "I can make Lord Dynham understand. Write from Norwood to Coombe, Hugo. That will be best."

And so Lord Dynham was told of Alice Penwarne's engagement, and of the unexpected necessity that had arisen for their return. He was very much "cut up"—repeating the expression with unusually undignified sincerity.

"If I ever wished for anything, I wished for her," he said. "I am afraid Belton will feel it cruelly."

But Lord Belton, suspecting what might be the subject of their conversation, walked into the room, and received the news from his father in Colonel Penwarne's presence. "I am quite cut up," repeated Lord Dynham. "I don't know what you may feel, Belton, but I admired her exceedingly."

"I have had time to recover. I knew it yesterday. Freddy Goodman and I talked of it at the ball. I knew she cared for somebody, because she cared in a pleasant way for me, and I should have won her, heart and hand, if there had been any left to win."

"You do me honour, sir," said Colonel Penwarne, smiling. "May I congratulate you on your wise far-sightedness? You will make some other woman happy, and then I will—yes, and from my heart I will congratulate her."

"I asked her, you know," said Lord Belton, "and she refused me—refused me in a certain way that made me know—made me know more than she knew she was telling; and if any man alive is worthy of so charming a woman, it is Hugo."

"He has loved her all his life, and of my life it has been

the great idea. There was a misunderstanding. They thought they had lost each other. It has been a grief to us—but it was only a mistake. He was as necessary to her life as she was to his, and during this visit of ours here, they found it out. We have to thank the geniality of the moral atmosphere of this place for the crowning happiness of our lives." Then Lord Dynham and Colonel Penwarne shook hands, and Lord Belton went away to make his congratulations.

He found Alice alone.

"I believe I am glad," he said, with no preliminary explanation.

"I am sure, if you had known all, you would have told me to say 'Yes,' as you once told me to say 'No,'" she answered.





CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE INEVITABLE.

The night is come; like to the day,
Depart not Thou, great God, away;
Let not my sins, black as the night,
Eclipse the lustre of Thy light.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

IN a state of nervous agitation, quite strange to all Lady Judith's former experience of life, she waited for Hugo. When he came she gave thanks.

"You see how ill I am," she said. "I can't help thinking of myself; any other wife, if health had permitted, would have gone to her husband after such a note as that of Desirée d'Antoine. I can't help being glad not to be able to go. I am saved from cruel criticism; and I have so changed lately—I could not bear to be evil-spoken of now, half as well as I could have borne it a year ago. Then I could have laughed."

"So Miss Teague and Letty are gone," said Hugo, not choosing to make any observation in answer to this speech.

"Yes; and I am torn to pieces with fears. They ought not to be there alone. He has not any servant with him. If he should—I may as well say it—die; Hugo, he has never been really strong; what can women do? It is not possible to send a servant after them. The case is altogether so out of all common experience. Hugo, would you go?"

"Yes; if there is really need. If you really wish it."

"You would rather not."

"Lady Judith, I will go, if you think it a moment when private feeling ought to be conquered. I am going to India before very long. I have just had the happiness of a

promise from Alice to be my wife; honestly, I feel I have no business with Mr. Drake, and no special call to be waiting on Letty."

"Heaven bless you both! Marriage is a terrible thing to some people. It has been a terrible thing to me. Because—I can't tell you why. But more than ever I ask you to go—go, tell him that I am able and willing to carry out any wish he may have formed to help a certain person whom he went there to befriend. Ascertain if he has done what he intended to do. This only if he should be dying. I do not wish him to take to the unknown world any unfulfilled thing that it might have been right for him to do. I do not wish Letty to be talked to about this. But I can't rest from the desire I have to spare him regrets in death. If our good deeds follow us, why not regrets? A sudden dread of things undone has come upon me. I have not been happy as a wife, but I would shield him in his death from all that might trouble him. Can you make him know this? I would be his faithful steward; the dispenser, very willingly, of any good deed that it might trouble him to leave unfulfilled."

Hugo looked puzzled and surprised. "I will do my best," he said.

She looked into his troubled face and her own grew calm. Her voice changed; it lost its agitation and became low, steady, sweet, and tender. "He had married before he married me. I married him, the first wife being alive, not knowing it. It made inwardly a separation between us, though we hid it from the world. We each carried our cross in our own way. I, badly enough no doubt. All are dead except one girl, of those who belonged to that first marriage. It was to help her that he went on this journey. If he has left anything as to that undone, I would do it. How frightened you look! Speak. Don't make any scruples; speak to me."

"I can't say it."

"Oh, forgive me. I know. They were divorced by the law of the country of which she was a subject. There was no sin. The conditions are easier there, you know. We can always be glad to find that there were no stories of crime, not even a suspicion of great sin. There is no harm in being glad of that——" she looked vaguely up into his face. He thought he had never seen anything in his life so sad.

"He thinks more of other people now than he did then,"

she said. "He never supposed that I should make a misery out of it."

An unutterable pity for her filled Hugo's heart. He was speechless. He knew everything that such a woman would feel. The whole of the possibilities as to the entail of the Trederick estate passed through his mind. She had said enough to show him that of the children only a daughter survived, but he quite trembled for what might have been, as his imagination measured the weight of the peculiar woe that this naturally proud woman had been called upon to suffer.

"I am sure the end has come," she said. "I feel so strangely sure of it. I would send him a message, only I don't know what to say. I am so confused between God's law and man's, that I don't know how to speak and not offend. I dare not say I forgive him—Have I anything to forgive? I dare not say I will welcome him home as a wife should, for I do not know if I have a husband. But I want peace, and to do right. Go for me, Hugo. I shall have done all I can do if I put you by his dying bed, and promise, through you, to do justice. And save Letty. Don't let Letty know."

"I am very glad to go," said Hugo, simply. "I will go now—in an hour I can be *en route* to Dover. If Miss Teague has stopped by the way, I shall overtake them. I must leave you now to write to Coombe."

His letter reached Coombe the next day. It waited there till Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne got home. They were looking for news anxiously, for, as yet, to them, all was mysterious. Miss Teague's letter had been travelling to Dynely as they travelled home, so the first news they got was from their servants. It was soon gossiped out, in every particular, and the first night at home passed wearily. In the morning they all three wandered away, and got to Trederick.

The unusually lovely weather still continued. Still the fish came into the bay, and the Huers from the cliff, watching the dark rippling surface which marked the shoals, called out the names of the seines to which they belonged, and so made claims to the treasures of the deep. Then down from the high lands over the cliff-side the man ran, calling "The 'Derrick, ahoy!" in the old way so familiar to Jane's girlhood; and every man and boy belonging to that seine left their talk, their work, their meals—whatever they

were engaged in, and rushed off to their boats. Then came the enclosing of those masses of fish, and the waiting for the shade of approaching night to take them up in safety. Then came the congratulations all round, the excitement of success, the knowledge of the worth in good money of the *catch* they had secured. Then, too, from glad hearts came honest thanksgivings, and the smoke of many evening fires rose from among the trees, and food was plenty and spirits high. Only Mrs. Penwarne stood by the parapet wall, close to the flower-beds her mother had contrived, and wept sad tears for Peter; longing to know more, trembling lest she should know worse than she already thought of, and very sad among the old memories, which came upon her with a subduing tenderness, and in extraordinary strength.

Then they returned to Coombe to be ready for the post, and they read Hugo's letter together.

The next day Marian Teague's letter was returned to them from Dynely, and then came three days of waiting.

Lady Judith had written a few words, and Mrs. Penwarne had written to her.

On the usual day Alice packed the box of flowers that Letty used to send so punctually, and wrote very tenderly, telling about Hugo, and dwelling so wisely and well on her own happiness, that Lady Judith blessed her in her heart as she read, and felt glad not to be shut out from joining in the hopes and joys of youth.

When the next letter came, it said how ill Mr. Drake was—"No better;" and, said Miss Teague, "it is a case in which 'no better' means much worse." Then again suspense.

They grew to be very glad that Hugo had gone. It was a terrible time to Mrs. Penwarne. And she had to bear it by herself, in an odd sort of loneliness, in which no one could take any part. Her strange girlhood, left as she had been, even neglected by this now dying brother, and for ever persecuted by him, other people knew of. But she knew more. She had loved him in the midst of many fits of childish anger; she had liked to please him, though she blamed his affectation, and hated his priggishness; she had had him, and him alone, of the home she had left; and whatever he had been, he had been her all—all that death had left her. All that spoke to her of her father's life, of her mother's story. It was truly a terrible time for Mrs. Penwarne.

At last there came a letter from Miss Teague. "We

shall be back almost as soon as this reaches you. We shall stop at Norwood. I will write from there. Peter is dead."

She wrote this to Colonel Penwarne. And all through the day the sea-bird's crying seemed to say, "He is dead." Jane heard it, saw it, felt it. Peter was dead. The sea-breeze whispered it, and the night sounds echoed it back. The old house seemed to become endowed with a sort of life, and to tell the truth through its halls, up and down the passages, and in their mother's room. The great shrubs bowed their heads, and seemed to stand still, sadly; the flowers seemed to droop; the waves of the heaving sea were less loud upon the sands; all things seemed to feel the silence that had come to that one—the master—whose lips were closed, whose brain was still, whose questioning heart had now been wholly answered.

And then, by herself, one evening, before they expected her, came Marian Teague. She came by herself, for she had travelled home with Letty, leaving Hugo behind, and she had left Letty at Norwood with her mother.

First inquiries were soon replied to. But there were other things, and Miss Teague, not wishing to be too closely questioned, told her story, as much as she intended to tell, at her leisure, and at her own suggestion.

"Letty travelled well," she said, "very bravely, very carefully. We actually never stopped beyond the hours allowed for food. When we got to the door of the hotel, the very first person I saw, Jane, was Desirée. She, like all of us, is older. I suppose she must be approaching five and forty now. Anyhow, she looks it. But I should have known her anywhere, as she would have known me. She is exactly her old self. She took me in her arms. She was in tears of joy. It was pretty to see her turn round, kiss Letty as if she had been a pet kitten, and then turn again to me. Then she would hear all about you. It was hard to satisfy her, she wanted to know so much. For the love of those old days, she had made herself into Peter's nurse. He was dying when we got there, you know. There never was a moment's hope. Letty knew it at once. She was, with the doctor's consent, taken to him directly. He was not in his right mind. He almost frightened her. He kept saying, 'She had my mother's eyes.' He would say it for half an hour together; just varied a little. It would be, 'She looked at me with my mother's eyes,' sometimes." Miss Teague paused.

"Letty is not the least like my mother, is she?" asked Mrs. Penwarne, amazed.

"Not the least," said Miss Teague, and went on. "He had got ill in this way. Desirée told all particulars minutely. He had gone out to some sort of charitable institution, to which he has, I fancy, been bountiful in some way or other, and for some reason. He had had a carriage to go there. He had walked back. There has been unusually hot weather. He was always imprudent. He had, after walking across an open plain, without any shelter, exposed throughout to the full power of the sun's rays, to make his way, by a short cut, through a part of a pine wood. The change into these woods is extreme. The cold and the darkness is like the sudden fall of night upon the full blaze of noonday. He got through this wood into the open plain again. He had sun-stroke, it is supposed. He was picked up insensible. He then became delirious. Illness of a dangerous kind set in; no earthly care could save him. He was just the man to suffer for such imprudence, and he was not of the constitution that could rally. So the end came."

Again Miss Teague paused. And after a few minutes through her sobs Mrs. Penwarne asked if he had never known Letty.

"I can hardly say. He recovered his mind in a great degree before he died. He knew Hugo; and he was very glad to have him there. Hugo said that he was convinced that he understood every word that he said to him. But when he saw Letty he always grew anxious, and spoke confusedly of her marrying Hugo. It was very sad," said Miss Teague. "But Hugo managed it very well; he told us about himself and Alice, and told Letty not to mind anything her father said. However, Peter's mind seemed to have travelled back to some past which had not had Letty in it. He took very little notice of her till just before he died. Then he held her hand, and said something about her mother, and 'Try to forgive me,' he said, quite distinctly, once." And so the story was told.

No one spoke for a few moments. Then Colonel Penwarne spoke. "Did he always know *you*?"

"Oh! yes;" wiping the tears from her eyes. "It was all his youth, and his visits to Trederrick and Nanny Teague once more. He knew me from the first; before he could understand that Letty was there."

"When does Hugo come back?"

"After the funeral. He was, as I said, calm and collected before he died. He wished to be buried there."

These few and simple facts were all that had to be said and listened to.

Over and over, with just those little fillings-up of the picture which were pleasant to Mrs. Penwarne, the tale was told, and told again.

No one at Coombe seemed ever to dwell on the great fact that Trederrick was now Colonel Penwarne's property, and that his wife could go through the old haunts, and wander through the dear first home as its mistress once more. But the villagers thought of it. They all talked, and the past, present, and future of every Penwarne they had ever heard of was spoken of and wondered over.

"Oh, but not to lie with his fathers! 'Twas a strange wish. What could have parted him from them in that last hour? But he was always over-fond of foreign parts. He more than half lived there in his youth. And after his marriage they never came home for nigh about two years, I remember." Marchant Gedds related these things to Mrs. Ferris, whose married life had broken into her Trederrick memories.

"'Twould have been a bad bringing up for a son. Perhaps 'tis as well that the Colonel should drop into the whole of it," said old Mitchel, the moral philosopher at the blacksmith's shop. "We've no call to half-and-halves. Now, there's the Captain; he's true to the back bone. Right down from head to foot, a real Penwarne. Do ye think it's true that he'll marry Miss Letty?"

"She'd have good luck in her husband if that was to come to pass. But there's another I should choose, if I had my way," said Gedds. "I never saw the like of Miss Alice with my two eyes."

The gossip was wafted into Geraldine Graham's quiet room, and she smiled one of those strange smiles which are never seen except on the face of the nearly gone—so Mrs. Ferris declared. "Ah, that will be," she sighed. "And she's right," whispered the old woman. "Such-like folk feel the future. It is a part of the wearing away, and the wearying on; and they get to something at last, and have a sense of the things that are to be. That's fixed, I tell you. You need say no more about Miss Letty."

. After a day or two, one day, down upon the sands, Miss Teague spoke to Alice, "I may never see you any more,

child, after I see you off to India again. I half wish to go with you. Only your mother grows, to me, younger rather than older, as I count up my own years. When you are gone she will be my own Jane once more, I suppose."

"Why not? I hope so. My mother is not old. Many people have only begun life at thirty-eight; and she is but a few months more. Sometimes I feel as if I could not have left her but for the thought of you. You have known her all her life. You are very precious Nanny Teague. When we were at Dynely we went, all of us, to the cottage where your mother lived; and we went into the rooms, and talked that time all through with a delightful old couple who live there now, and who describe everything charmingly. I know where the pictures hung which you have got there now, and the place was shown us which that long narrow mirror occupied between the windows. My mother went there every day, I believe. And when I am gone you will have Letty. Letty will always be in your life now, of course."

"I don't know. Where will they live? What is to happen about Trederrick. I think uninhabited houses—that is, houses haunted by memories—are very melancholy things to those who, like me, have to provide the ghosts."

"Ah," said Alice, "my father has never talked about that. Only he is going to Norwood; he said he should go as soon as he heard of Hugo's being there. And he can't be away much longer. He will be sure to be in England soon."





CHAPTER XXXIX.

A NEW LIFE.

And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new,—
What hope, what help?—E. B. BROWNING.



FROM the moment that Letty walked into her mother's presence, on returning with Miss Teague, she found herself in a new world, and with every moment seemed to come some new experience. The girl's mind had been so filled with the thought of death that she had not formed any idea of what her mother might say, or do. It had been her first experience of death. It had come to take from her the greatest of her earthly interests. It had come suddenly, sadly, coldly; without any of those last words and tender partings which sweeten the future.

If there had been anything said that it might be a happiness to remember, those things had not been said to her; and there had been with all she had gone through an unwelcome sort of mystery, a something not to be understood by any effort of memory or imagination.

Letty felt sadly stricken under these trials; and saddened by an almost stony-hearted sense of a loss greater than death—of a parting and separation of interest which made death a double grief—she reached the house where her mother was, and walked upstairs and into that mother's room.

"Will you go alone?" Miss Teague had asked. A whispered "Yes" had been the only answer, and so the mother and child had met, and looked at each other.

Neither of them spoke. But Lady Judith walked up to where Letty stood like a statue, paler, colder, sadder than

any heart but her own could calculate, and took her in her arms.

There was something in this embrace which was new to Letty. Something too that told her that there was no acting in it. She could not speak. Her heart felt bursting with the trial of the moment, with the trial of the determination she had suddenly formed and intended to go through with.

"You have lost a great deal, Letty."

"It was gone before he died. He seemed only to wish to say one thing—that I should marry Hugo. Mother, you know he will marry Alice. Mother, he is the most excellent of men, and asked me not to mind my poor father's wandering words. Mother!"

It was a strange thing to see Letty, and to hear her. There was something labouring to tell itself, and shaking her with the heart-throes by which it asserted its power.

"Speak, Letty. What is it?" said Lady Judith, trying to draw her daughter towards her; but Letty shrank aside at her touch. Lady Judith, exhausted by illness and trouble, and now quite overwhelmed by the sight of her child, sank into a chair, staring at her. In another moment, by her side, was Letty on her knees.

"Mother," she said once again, "if we are ever to be right with each other, I must ask one thing."

"Ask what you will, dear one," said Lady Judith, putting her gentle hand on Letty's head—"speak as you choose. I have loved you more tenderly than you ever knew of. I have nothing else to love. I long to love now."

"If I tell you to keep my question a secret, will you be true, and never utter it?"

"I will indeed be true, Letty."

"Will you be true in another way, and answer it honestly, faithfully, truthfully, as before God? Mother, all the happiness of our lives may depend on your truth this moment—now."

"I will tell you the truth. I will answer the question you may ask, whatever it is, and whatever it may cost me."

Letty rose up. Very pale she still was, but now she was quiet, and she spoke calmly.

"Did you ever hear that Cecil Carteray loved and wished to marry me?"

Lady Judith rose, put her arm round Letty, and held her towards her heart. "No. But a short time since Hugo

Penwarne told me that once, just for a passing moment, he suspected it. Did he love you, darling?"

"He said so."

"Tell all to me. Letty, I declare to you—I see what you would ask in your face—I declare before heaven I never knew, and I never suspected it. What did he say?"

"He said all that any man could say; and I loved him. Mother, he asked, and I told him. It was such glory—such blessedness! It would be a dreadful trial now to recall that time. He was to ask for me as his wife. He never did. He went away; he got out of our lives; he left me—it killed me nearly—and I thought that you had sent him from me. We are alone in the world now. Can you understand how I feel?—that, if we are to be ever anything to each other, I must know the truth."

"I can understand you. I declare once again that I never knew, and that I know no more than I have this moment learnt from you. Has it been all silence, Letty?"

"Silence—darkness. The light of my life went out."

Then Lady Judith took her once more into her arms, and laid her still face upon her breast. "Letty, when I was your age, I loved a good man, who loved me, and I believed that he had deserted me. He married. I married. But he had not deserted me. My mother had done what you have suspected me of doing. I vowed in my heart never so to use a child of mine, and I kept my vow. If I had known of Cecil's love, it would have been different. I have been a bad mother to you, when, by giving you up, I thought that I was doing my best. If I had not given you up, you would have told me. Oh! how hard it is to know right from wrong!"

"Mother, why did you give me up, as you call it? If you loved me, how could you give me up?"

"I cannot tell you," she said. "There are things in the past that are buried now."

Letty looked at her as if some as yet unthought-of excuses for her mother's conduct were dawning upon her.

"This once let us speak of it," said Lady Judith—"never more than this once, Letty."

Letty bowed her head in silence.

"He had not much to love in this world. It was so—never mind why! perhaps I was wrong, but life was once very difficult to me; however, it was so, or it so seemed to me, that, after your brother's death, you could not belong to both of us. He took you; I yielded you; but the love

never died—never died, my darling." And then they turned towards each other, looked life-long promises into each other's eyes, and shed those happy tears that reconcile us to life, and to each other.

In this way Letty's first meeting with her mother was gone through. When they went downstairs together to Miss Teague, it was more as if each had found a relative than that each had lost the nearest they had in the world. When they were left together, the love grew fast. The silent tenderness of Lady Judith on all matters connected with her married life touched Letty's heart; the strange words and allusions of her father on his dying bed no more troubled her memory. There was a dead past. She knew that. It was enough that it should be buried.

After about a week, Hugo Penwarne came; and on the following day came the Colonel. He entered their room with that air of friendship and interest which always sat so well upon him, and from its sincerity was always so pleasant and so welcome; and "I am come to take you to Frederick, Lady Judith. Letty," and he kissed her, "there are things to be done which can only be done by you, and which, to be done properly, must be done there."

Lady Judith looked a little hesitatingly into his face, and then into Hugo's.

"I suppose we could all go down together the day after to-morrow," said Hugo. "I shall want to-morrow for town."

"Must I?—ought I?" said Lady Judith.

"You must place yourselves in my hands. I too have business in town to attend to. The day after to-morrow is fixed, then?"

No difficulties were made. The day came, and the journey was accomplished. The carriage drew up at Frederick. Colonel Penwarne led her into the home she had always admired, and said to her, "All business matters had better be got over at once. Would you like me to come to you to-morrow? I have had everything got ready for you. The will can be read to-morrow. Will you have any one here besides ourselves and your legal adviser? Will you think about it, and let me know this evening?"

"I do not want to think; and I desire only to get things done. Legal advice won't be wanted. Mr. Copley will be here, I suppose?"

"As a matter of course—he came to me to propose to-morrow——"

"To-morrow let it be," she said. "You are a good friend, and I am glad to feel that it is so. Do you know that you are Letty's guardian with me?"

"Peter told me. There is a trusteeship, too, till she is of age. Good-bye."

"My love to Jane. Bring her to-morrow, please. Good night."

When Lady Judith was alone, she could scarcely believe that a few hours and a few words had done so much. It was hard to her too to believe that never more within those walls would Peter Drake's footstep be heard, or his voice make those positive utterances that had echoed there so long. She shivered with a cold sense of loneliness; and yet there was a weight off her life, and she knew it.

That night, even when it was getting late, she said to her daughter, "I want to go into the old places—I want to walk down the library, dear."

So they took a chamber candle, and turned away from the lighted hall into the small room where he had always sat to write, and then to the long library, at the end of which was the great window looking out on the shrubs that Jane had had pruned away before Peter came back as a married man to his father's house,—and upon the sea beyond the village elms.

"It must be moonlight," said Lady Judith. Letty put down the light and opened the window shutters.

Such a light seemed to stream in upon them, it quite startled her mother. The great full October moon lighting up the sea, and showing, even at that distance, the silvery ripples between the trees; the scene boats, full of life in the midst of that silvery stillness; the quiet, strongly-marked shadows on the turf before them; the mystery of the little paths of darkness that went up among the beech trees. "Never more!—oh! Peter, never more!" The sentences were sighed forth, with one sad sob separating them; and they fell with a healing power on Letty's heart. The girl had wanted, with an aching sense of desire, to grieve with a softer sorrow. The hard, cold, incomprehensible grief hurt her. But the voices about the old home spoke of better things.

"Life becomes but a small thing here, where in an old historic home, death has been so often. How many eyes,

my child, have looked on that great ocean! How many have been closed never more to see what we see now! Oh! the great sublimity of death! Without it how mere a nothingness life would be! It is that which makes life worth living."

"Yet it is a punishment," said Letty.

"Is punishment necessarily bad?"

"Have you suffered, mother?"

"Yes, dear child; even in this beautiful place on which I look now tenderly with a long farewell in my eyes."

"And did you always know that suffering was good?"

"My dear, to know that is to cease to suffer; to have overcome your will; to have found something to offer; to have made the offering, and to be free."

"Mother, I learnt that when I was ill."

"Then we can be thankful together."

"Mother—" it seemed to be a new word with a new meaning that had come to Letty's life, and she liked saying it—"Mother, might I ever know anything of your grief and your life? I have seen its shadow; I have felt its chill—might I ever know any more?"

"No, darling. You will never know more. Or, only this: my trouble came from jarring facts, and, as it seemed to me, contradictory truths. It was as if I were haunted, and held in captivity by a spectre. Then it had to be, on that point, a silent life. It was nothing, for it was unseen, unheard; it was everything, for I could never get away from it. It is gone. Letty, if you could ask me this—'Did my father do wrong?' I should say 'No,' not according to his knowledge and belief! If you could say to me—'Did *you* do wrong?' I should answer, 'No, not according to my ignorance, and my disbelief.' That is all you can ever know, my child."

"But you are not an unbeliever?"

"No. I am not what you mean by that word. But on one point, which point made up to me all life, I could not believe what others thought right, and they could not understand what I thought wrong. It is over now. *One* has reached knowledge; and *I* must wait, and trust."

"He always admired and praised you," whispered Letty with quivering lips.

"Yes, my love. And he was a man to be admired, and on very many points to be praised. He was a just man."

We parted without any bitterness in our hearts—there had not been any there for some time, I think. We are getting cold, Letty. We had better go."

"No. Stop. We are never to say anything about this ever again?"

"Never again."

"Are you glad?"

Lady Judith looked at her. "I have so suffered; I have had such hard battles with myself. Any woman on earth would be glad to have no more to do of that sad sort. But when you were ill, and I thought of death as I had never—having generally had perfect health—as I had never thought before. I thought that I could not die with a quarrel in my heart. Once I had had it said to me that, whatever our lives were, they were *our* lives, and to be accepted, supposing we were not in sin, as the best lives for us. So I began to consider very heartily—yes, on my knees, often, both by day and night—what those words meant. I am not then glad that your father is dead, though it has made me free; I am free, I say; and the blessing is unutterable. Yet, I am not glad, because, if this only way out of our trouble had been given to us to take at our will, I would have died instead of him. Yes; if he had only wished for one more year in this world, I would have bought it for him with my life. I know I would. I know it as far as we can know anything by self-examination apart from experience."

"Thank you," whispered Letty; and her mother, kissing her, led her away.

Then, when Lady Judith was alone, she began to think of Hugo's words that had marked a date in her life. Such a little thing it seemed to be—so small a light, reminding her of Henry Vaughan's verse—

"One twinkling ray
Shot o'er some cloud,
May clear much way,
And guide a crowd."



CHAPTER XL.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

Sad is our youth, for it is ever going,
Crumbling away beneath our very feet :
Sad is our life, for it is ever flowing
In current unperceived, because so fleet.

AUBREY DE VIRE.

THE next day the will was read. Peter had grown wise and provident, and things turned out unexpectedly well. Lady Judith had been provided for under her marriage settlements, and she had no more, but, with her own property, her means were sufficient. She had not wished for more, she took occasion to say. The whole of the Trederrick property was Colonel Penwarne's. Of the Drake property, after paying off the mortgages, not more than fifteen thousand pounds could be realized, and this was left to Letty. To Letty, also, of whom her father seemed to have delighted to speak with affection, all the rest of his property, without any exception, was left. He had said, in a paper of directions, and of written requests and wishes, that she would no doubt allow her mother to take all books and articles of furniture which had been by mutual understanding considered as part of her personal property. A large part of the furniture, books, plate, and several cases of jewellery, which Lady Judith had always refused to wear, belonged, with the estates, to Colonel Penwarne. Of these the most accurate lists were left. All other things of the same kind were described and catalogued, and left to Letty without any reserve. To her also he left all his manuscripts, collections, and papers, saying she would find them sorted and arranged, so as to

make it easy for her to destroy all that were not worth keeping, and to keep any that might interest her.

"All these things," suggested Mr. Copley, "we had better put immediately into your hands, Miss Drake. They are all, without exception, in Mr. Drake's private room. Let us go there, make a general examination, and then give you the keys."

Before mid-day all the legal papers and parchments concerning the Trederrick property were delivered into Mr. Copley's keeping, and Letty was left mistress of such things as her father had entrusted to her discretion and care.

Before night Colonel Penwarne had told Lady Judith to look on Trederrick as her own for as long a time as she pleased. "The expense of keeping up the place will fall on me," he said. "But if you will inhabit the house as you please, and when you please, till Hugo brings his wife home—they will be married within a month, and sail within six weeks; they can hardly be absent less than five years—if you, Lady Judith, will treat Trederrick as your own till then, you will save me a great deal of trouble—for I should never let it, and looking after an uninhabited house would be very disagreeable—and give us all a great deal of pleasure."

"I will come here whenever you will let me," she said. "But Letty and I have talked over so many things, and we are going to spend this winter at San Remo. Let us come home—you see I still speak of home—let us come here in the spring."

It seemed wise to everybody that there should be this great break. Everybody saw that something had occurred between Letty and her mother. There was love enough now to make the lookers-on augur well for the happiness of the days to come; and the world, which is not by any means as ill-natured as some people would have us believe, was very well pleased to see the change; and there was wise talk of how trouble brought people together; and of how, now that Letty had no father to spoil her, she would be a good daughter to Lady Judith, who had led an odd, lonely sort of life, between her self-absorbed husband and her half-estranged daughter, it was easy to see.

But there was in reality very little feeling about the death of Peter Drake. He was gone. That was all. The lamenting was nothing; the wonder was much more; and that he should not lie with his fathers! People kept all

their sighing for that. So it always is in the case of such as have lived so systematically for themselves.

Many years after people spoke tenderly of his memory, and said how loving he had been to Letty; how he had stored her mind with learning; how she had grown strong and good and brave under home discipline, and borne life's burdens meekly, and been very bountiful and loved the poor. But it took years to forget him—to forget him in the sense of calling his good deeds and the better part of his character to remembrance.

Now, when the law has gone its course, and Trederick was, once more, "Miss Jane's" home if she chose to live in it, the world around turned easily, and with smiles which bore on them no memories of tears, to the wedding-day of Alice Penwarne. It soon occupied everybody's thoughts; everybody except Alice herself, who seemed to be taking life very easy just then, declaring that it was hard to make Happiness believe that it had anything to do.

"And you, who were the first to say, 'Let us live here at Coombe for ever, and never wander about any more,' are the first to leave it," said Mrs. Penwarne with loving reproach.

"It is humiliatingly true," Alice answered. "But I want to have as much of it as ever I can, and so I leave you and Nanny Teague to do all the work. Indeed," she said earnestly, "I cannot get enough of this place. I wish October would live a little longer this year. Was ever anything so lovely?—and I never knew anything before of the glories of the fishing. It is a golden harvest every day, and a gathering in of it every night. I don't wonder at Hugo being so often out with the boats."

"Your father delights in seeing him identify himself with everything here," said Mrs. Penwarne. "His name will be held in loving recollection. The people are all devoted to him. He is a wonderful man. So little display in him—none, in fact. So honoured by the strong men; blessed by the weak. See how poor Geraldine Graham speaks of him; and what a man he has made of that boy Joe! Your father is to take the management of all that when you and Hugo are gone. I was quite surprised at Joe's improvement. What has been done for him will influence his whole life. He will be sure to get on when he reaches his Canadian friends. I saw some of their letters the other day, and was very much pleased with the

superiority of their tone ;—but I wander away from Hugo—it is a great thing to marry a man whose name is connected in every one's mouth with blessings."

"Thank you, mother. No doubt it is a good thing. Have I not seen it all my life? Is not my mother's luck an inheritance? I am told so everywhere.

'Where the good men wisely live
There the children nobly thrive!'

I was always given to the admiration of fine verse; and I believe that specimen has the advantage of being perfectly true."

The farewell conversations of Mrs. Penwarne and her daughter had never a trace of melancholy on them. The days wore on full of work, loaded with preparation. A few moments would be given to tears sometimes, when Mrs. Penwarne thought of her brother, or Alice had a word to say of Uncle Peter. But there was little time for any indulgence of sadness, even if there had been any desire for a luxury of such doubtful excellence. His footsteps were being fast trodden out of the path of life, and the great ocean was filling up the sands to an even surface, ready for the feet to press, and for the treading out of other people's lives.

Even Letty had no wish to indulge in fruitless grief, or bring any pain into their lives at Frederrick that could rightly be avoided.

She had looked through her father's papers, and put the parcels, one after another, aside, just as he had himself tied them up, with the almost unexampled accuracy that belonged to him. One box of tied-up packets of letters was marked—"For my daughter, to destroy without examination." These she immediately burnt, carefully and entirely. Then came some marked—"Interesting. To be destroyed or kept, at my daughter's discretion." These she put away with the determination to postpone all further examination till a future day; for she had had Colonel Penwarne's leave to hold possession of her father's room for the safe keeping of these papers. And at last she came on a large quantity of things, evidently for the most part letters, and described as "Correspondence and memoranda, which, at her leisure, my daughter may probably like to examine before destroying." Those, also, Letty put away, not choosing—not, indeed, feeling that it was possible to take any interest in this legacy of information at that moment. "When we

come back,"—that was the date at which she decided she would examine everything. So she enclosed those in another paper, and directed her mother to destroy them if she herself, by any circumstances then unforeseen, should be prevented from coming back to do the work with her own hands.

So a week passed after the return to Trederrick, and both there and at Coombe the near approach of Alice's marriage made time feel very precious. The two houses were always sending their inhabitants out from one place to the other. Their neighbours scarcely dared to venture to break in upon those last moments, and those memories which were to be for the consolation of so many years.

One evening, or rather night, Mrs. Penwarne stood with Alice and Miss Teague on the lawn at Coombe; they had again been watching the boats, and again been joining in the general gladness about a great "catch" of fish.

Suddenly Colonel Penwarne came up to them. "Something wrong with the boats"—he could hardly speak—"the men have been up to me. Did you not hear? I must go." He left them.

The men from the stables rushed through the path by the shrubs. The house was deserted. The women-servants came out to the lawn.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Penwarne anxiously.

"Oh! ma'am, did you not hear the voices? The Captain's voice—'*Save the boy!*'—was heard up above on the high lands, where Ben was looking out."

"It is Joe," said Miss Teague. "Good night. I must go. I must learn the truth. Poor Geraldine!—I am sure it is Joe."

She went away as fast as she could. Mrs. Penwarne and Alice were left alone. They were silent at first through the intensity of their fears.

"Might I go?" asked Alice. "I can't stand waiting here."

"Come, then," said Mrs. Penwarne; and they had hats and shawls brought to them, and with one of the servants went quickly down the wood-path to the stream, and the wooden bridge, and the village. There, just where the road turned off to the cot-farm, they saw what made them shut their eyes, and turn aside and weep—a sad procession; Hugo walking on one side, and Colonel Penwarne on the other, of the men who were carrying, wrapped up in a canvas sail—what?

Whether they asked, or whether unasked, people were found to tell them, they did not know; but Joe had fallen over from the boat side, and had had a blow, and was dead.

Silently, under the bright sun-lit sky, Mrs. Penwarne and Alice walked home. Silently, through the open fields, the bearers of that solemn burden passed, and drew near to the enclosure round the Cot Farm. Mrs. Ferris and Miss Teague unfastened the wicket-gate. The house-door was wide open. They walked slowly, side by side, and Mrs. Ferris led the way to the room which joined the one where Geraldine lay. All things were ready. The men laid the dead body on the place prepared for it, bared their heads, looked for a moment on the face which Mrs. Ferris uncovered, and went quietly away. Only Colonel Penwarne and Hugo were left.

"Does she know?" asked Hugo.

"Yes; we had to tell her. She could hear them coming."

"May I see her?" asked Hugo.

Mrs. Ferris moved towards the door, and, by a sign, signified to Hugo that he should follow her. Geraldine was sitting up in the bed, not at all like a being of this world, so almost transparent in her delicate paleness, so wonderful in the beauty that the approach of death had made unearthly in its character; her eyes luminous, her white hands outstretched, her whole form swaying towards them. "Is it true?" were the words that passed voicelessly over her white lips.

"It is true that he fell, was struck, and is dead." She became for one moment, or for one point of time too instantaneous in its passage to be marked, except by its effect, bright—bright in the countenance, bright in the eyes turned first to heaven, then towards Hugo, with a swaying of the body which made him step forward and put his arm behind her. He thought she might fall back. She did, and died.

A few days more, and then two graves, side by side, not far from where the Penwarne had, from generation to generation, waited, showed where Geraldine Graham and Joe lay also waiting; and showed to the villagers who talked of the captain's goodness, and of Joe fine prospects, where his friends lived across the sea, the vanity of human wishes, the futility of long-made plans.

It made a great deal of talk. Mrs. Baynard shed honest tears. Hearts long hardened towards their neighbours'

lives got broken up, and brought forth sudden growths of sympathy. Old Sir Harry Goodman wondered why so many went, and he was left behind. Mrs. Carteray wrote to Cecil, and told the pathetic tale in an excellent letter devoted to Joe and Geraldine, and to Lady Judith, Letty, and Mr. Drake's will. And these events would have occupied people's minds much longer than they did, if it had not been for the preparations for Alice's marriage, and the bringing home of the bride to Lerrins.

The rejoicings over Captain Goodman's happiness, the spirit of gay gladness that came with Liza, quite took their world captive, and subjugated the inhabitants. Sir Harry was in bliss. "It reconciles one to this poor world, in spite of its deaths and its dangers. To have that dear little creature to bless my old age, who held by my finger, and so trudged about by my side when she was no higher than my knee, is a great thing, let me tell you, Mrs. Penwarne—far better than seeing a man go off to the Mormons."

Mrs. Penwarne, on this, her bridal visit, was speechless with horror. Miss Teague had to explain that this was only a triumphant fling of the imagination diverted against Cecil Carteray, and not worth disputing about. Sir Harry laughed, and other people laughed in chorus. Mrs. Carteray alone looked hurt. But she was a loving and devoted daughter, and contented herself with a whispered declaration that her father's absurdity was of no matter, the thing stated not being true. "I believe old age is prophetic," said the happy bridegroom, ill-naturedly.

So Freddy Goodman had played his game of life with winning cards. He could not care for any grief that might be reigning at Trederrick—he must go and see Lady Judith. Her grand, pale, beautiful face and black garments sobered him. He was gentle and grateful; she was kind and smiling.

"I felt her to be more unapproachable than if she had been like a common kind of woman, and shed tears, and said the things that everybody says," he declared to Alice, whom he found at Coombe an hour after. "Letty is changed too. She is not sad, nor weak, nor shrinking away, as she has lately been. The two women stand side by side, as if they were never going to part. I can't think why Letty has never got married."

"Letty is not out of her teens, sir. Give us time, if you please."

"And you—and yet you are going to be married?"

"Oh, yes; much too soon. But good husbands are hard to come by; Marchant Gedds tells me. I did not dare to let my chance go by."

"Losing both you and Hugo at one stroke is too much. I am sorry for Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne."

"Don't waste your feelings. We shall be home again directly. It will be as nothing. In that lies the advantage of being still in one's teens. And my father and mother like to be alone. They have not told out their own love-story yet. It is all as good as anything well can be; and pity would be wasted if offered to any one here."

It was quite true. Everybody knew that there was come a time for thanksgiving, so they prepared for it by drying their tears.

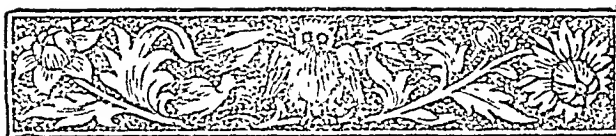
And at last, and yet very soon, the day came: the wedding day. And before the grass was grown on those new graves, Alice and Hugo had said the "*I will*" that lasts "till death us do part," and gone away from Coombe and Trederrick as man and wife.

Mrs. Penwarne and Miss Teague had performed wonders of work in the arrangement of the outfit. Did they not know better than any other two persons in the world what Alice would want?

And one soft sweet day they stood with telescopes in hand, gazing on the sea. So were Lady Judith and Letty gazing. So were the servants and labourers; so were the children of the school. So gazed Mrs. Ferris, though her eyes were dim with tears. So gazed groups of girls and boys, of women and men, from the points of cliff and crag, and from the moor-land heights.

The good ship, with everything prosperous, fair winds and hopes, and followed by blessings and prayers, was making her way down the channel. Colonel Penwarne was on board. He was to come back to land by the boat that would fetch the pilot.

"How well I remember it all!" said Mrs. Penwarne. "We can't be sorry for Alice—scarcely for ourselves. Our wishes are fulfilled. Arthur will be back by the morning."



CHAPTER XLI.

TWILIGHT.

As travellers when the twilight's come,
And in the sky the stars appear,
The past day's accidents do summe
With—"Thus we saw there, and thus here."

HENRY VAUGHAN.

UPON Letty's life a twilight had descended. It had come upon her by degrees. She was in the shadow; and the brightness of day, the sounds that belong to sunshine were no more; almost she was forgotten, or, at least, unseen. Miss Teague was writing letters for Mrs. Ferris, and corresponding with those relatives of Geraldine Graham who had prepared a life of prosperity for Joe. Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne were in the bliss of a lover-like loneliness, of which people were sensible, and which it required rather an effort to break in upon; and Freddy Goodman and his light-hearted Liza contrived to occupy the entire attention of every individual belonging to them.

When Letty said with a sigh that they were to leave Trederrick, Liza said, "Yes; to be on the Riviera. How delightful!" And when Letty spoke of Trederrick being deserted, the happy young wife exclaimed, "How charming not to have to put things away in boxes, and be at one's wits' end for a home for one's belongings! At Trederrick they will abide in peace, and the good old servants will take their rest and be thankful." No side of life was sorrowful or capable of showing grief to Mrs. Goodman. She delighted in everything and loved everybody.

"She can't see things," said Letty. "I wander in the dark places to which people's eyes can only penetrate with difficulty

and after much trying. It will all come right, I suppose, by-and-by."

But the packing went on with steadiness, and before Christmas they were gone—gone! Letty repeated the word, and re-stated the fact to herself many times. Gone from Trederrick. Gone! They hurried away as fast as express trains could take them, as speedily as *la grande vitesse* allowed. And soon, Letty's heart and inner life was in the twilight. Her actual existence was in the sweet south, and she breathed the balmy air of the Mediterranean. But all was very still. They talked together as if they had done their life's journey—of how it was this, or that, in other days.

They kept up a pleasant correspondence with friends in England, but they stayed away; months—many months; more than a year, till another spring came, and Colonel and Mrs. Penwarne joined them in Rome.

Still, neither Letty nor her mother wished to return to England. No inconvenience was caused by their leaving their possessions at Trederrick. The idea of Hugo and Alice living there was still in Colonel Penwarne's mind; until that time came, if Lady Judith would not live there, no one else would. So the time went on, and to Lady Judith it was rest, and "the perception of ease," and to Letty all she wanted—forgetfulness; that forgetfulness of self that change brings; and that forgetfulness of self, persevered in, became at last habitual. She recognised this as a good that had come to her, and she welcomed it in an honest spirit.

In this way years passed by—actually years; all those years which were to be the sum of Hugo's absence, and which now were brought to their minds by the announcement of his and Alice's intended return. *Actual*

"My love," said Lady Judith, "can it be true? Five years——"

"Nearly five, mother."

"And how many children has Alice?"

"Two, mother; boys. You know one died lately, the youngest."

"I knew that. I only forgot about the living ones. Well, we had better answer Jane's letter, and say we will come home."

"Yes; I think so."

"I declare I shall like it. But I have never pined for England."

"Nor have I. But if Sir James and Lady Luxton had not spent two winters with us; and if Aunt Jane and Uncle Penwarne had not been with us, and if we had not seen Miss Teague when she paid her visit to Madame d'Antoine, perhaps we might have pined a little."

"Very likely, Letty, you are twenty-four."

"Yes, mother."

"I shall write about our house in London to-night. Sir James would look it over with Sophy. When did the tenants go out?"

"Only three months ago."

"Well, we can go to England. I will stay in London. You can go to Coombe; I can follow you—will that do? I am thinking that you may like to be at home by yourself while looking over the papers you speak of sometimes."

"Perhaps I should," said Letty, quietly.

"And when you go to Trederrick, Miss Teague would stay there with you."

"Yes; I am sure she would. But it would not take me long. And you would certainly come?"

"I would come the moment you sent for me. While you were there I could work at the house in town. I like going home to employment."

It was all very easily settled. The year had just begun. Cold as it was, their hearts had been long enough away to warm to the idea of going back. The great break in their lives had answered. And as soon as their return was fixed, they both began to long after all they had left.

Sir James Luxton proved himself to be the friend in need. Sophy wrote like an upholsteress; and Lady Judith and Letty reached London, and found themselves welcomed by dear friends, into a house warm and glowing, with a good deal more joy than they had once thought possible. The twilight was being brilliantly lighted, and Letty had not only found her strength but her smiles.

The first evening Sir James and Lady Luxton spent with them; the next day Alice appeared.

She was welcomed rapturously. Scarcely altered. A woman, not a mere girl—that was all the change they could see in her. "Where are you, and how came you here? And where is Hugo?"

There she stood in her fair, graceful womanhood, the

quiet smiling happiness of her sweet face telling whole histories which were very pleasant to read. Oh! Hugo is with the children. Of course those wonderful beings are never left to themselves, quite. But Hugo is shooting, and bird-stuffing, and out in a boat, and never, I believe, sees them except when they are asleep, when his admiration is boundless. We are at Ventnor. We got frightened for fear the little people should suffer by their first winter in England, and my mother turned me out at Coombe."

"Oh, Alice!" And her hearers laughed.

"Indeed she did. She was sure our being anxious would trouble my father. So we took a house at Ventnor for the winter, and though we are going backwards and forwards perpetually, we are not to go there to live till May. I am going home for a week now. I wish you were going too."

Then Lady Judith explained their plans; and the next day Letty and Alice travelled to Coombe together.

"When I got back," said Alice, "it seemed to me as if I had only been away months instead of years." But Letty looked gravely at the well-known trees and land-marks. It seemed to her as if she had been away a lifetime, and as if the changes of a lifetime were marked upon her.

It was all arranged immediately. She stayed for three days at Coombe, and then went to Trederrick, with Miss Teague as her companion.

Letty had consulted her friends, and it had been agreed that the boxes containing any papers of family interest should be left at Trederrick till she might choose to claim them, and that she should first look over those of her father's papers and letters which had been left by him for her perusal, and keep or destroy, as she might, after consideration, decide.

There was an interest, grave, but not melancholy, in being again within the old walls. Of the things in the house not an article was changed. Everything had been excellently cared for. The same old man-servant stood by the chair; the same old housekeeper received her orders. The fires glowed, the lights made the house cheerful as in former days; and when she went to the end of the long library, and let the flood of moonlight in, it wrapped her round, and shrouded the tall elms, with their pencilled outlines, against the silver sky and swaying sea, as it had in years long past. Everything was the same. Only the

sky was cold, and the sea had no boats floating on its breast. Everything was the same; but still, as if all the events of life had been counted out, and there was in the future no more work—only waiting till the end. Everything—even she herself was the same—just the same; only with a dim consciousness that somewhere near her was the ghost of her youth. Even the work that lay before her was not of the present, but the paying of a debt to the past. So she turned from the passionless sky and the pale moonlight, and went to her rest, asking Miss Teague to sit with her by her bed-room fire, and talk a little before she went to sleep.

Miss Teague and Letty sat in the pleasantest, brightest, and warmest of little bed-rooms—Letty's own, where she had been mistress since childhood; where she had been well, and very ill; where she had a hundred little odd treasures stored away, and old memories, not now worth recalling, locked up in cupboards years ago.

"What have you been doing to day?" asked Miss Teague. "And when do you begin on your work? I would get it over soon."

"Yes; I think I feel rather in a hurry to get things over. And as to to-day, I have been preparing my mind to undergo its task free from distractions. Tell me, what have you been doing here?"

"You have been away five years, and nearly three months. How can I tell you anything? And pray remember what long letters I wrote to you."

"Lately, then; tell me the late news, please."

"I believe that there is no late news. When Mr. Baynard got a holiday last year he went off to a Scotch river for salmon-fishing; and a few months ago Mrs. Baynard took a governess for Laura."

"I am sorry. She will be in the way. I can't care about Laura's governess."

"But I think you will care. She is one of those relatives of Geraldine Graham who would have given Joe a home, if better had not come of him."

"Oh, indeed!" ejaculated Letty.

"And her being here is a real pleasure to Mrs. Ferris. It was quite an odd story. Ask Mrs. Baynard."

"No one has died," said Letty.

"No one belonging to us. But some one has come alive. Did I tell you that Cecil Carteray has been here."

"No," said Letty.

"Well, he was here for a week. He came to see me. He would not visit the Baynards. He made them go to Marsland. He would not stay there longer. He withstood a dreadful amount of pressing from dear old Sir Henry, with tears from his stepmother, upbraiding from Fred, entreaties from Liza, and such wistful praying glances from Mrs. Baynard—I wonder what he is made of. And he had not anything to do. Mr. Baynard and I were the only wise ones. I never spoke, and he said that he supposed Cecil knew his own business, and so he went away."

"Were they at home at Coombe?"

"No. They were at Dynely. So he wandered about all the old walks by himself. I did the honours of this place, or tried to do them. I asked if he would like to come to the house, and walk through the rooms, and smoke a cigar on the terrace. But he said he had no wish to do anything of the kind."

"He used to enjoy the library," said Letty.

"Well, after that he joined Mr. Baynard in Scotland; and then, having no more to talk of, we began to talk of Mary again. Mrs. Ferris calls Laura's governess Mary—'poor Mary,' generally. So we have adopted her manner, and the girl likes it. She has such a sad, sweet face; and it brightens into little Joe's smile. I assure you she is quite a circumstance in the place. Laura dotes on her, and is already a civilized being, and able to talk French. One can't help feeling interested in everything connected with Geraldine Graham; and Joe, poor dear little Joe."

"Yes; oh yes," said Letty earnestly.

Then, the next day Letty's work began. It was a work of no difficulty. The habitual order in which Mr. Drake kept everything made the examination a very easy matter. Letty had got through everything but the one box specially made over to her care by her father. One glance sufficed to show that it contained notes of private affairs, letters which he had thought it interesting to keep, and copies of his answers to them. She put that box aside for another day, and walked with Miss Teague to see the Baynards.

Letty was heartily, even fearfully welcomed. Pretty Mrs. Baynard was as pretty as ever; and Mr. Baynard not altered in any particular. Laura was a tall girl, instead of a fleet-footed child; and Letty saw "poor Mary," as she looked from the window, and beckoned the child to come to her

"Oh, my dear Letty, we have had no events since you left us. Only my father is very old, but so happy to have Freddy and Liza by him that one can't help being very glad. Then Mrs. Carteray is older—has grey hairs. I can't tell how many, but they are not past counting yet, I believe; and she is so angry with me—it is a chronic state with her now—because I took the good Canadian girl for a governess. You know Freddy is master of the hounds, and my father renews his youth. He rides out to the meets, and sometimes does more; and he hears about the runs; and hunting is a blessed invention—it gives him such an interest in life, all through the winter, which would really be very dreary, dull, and inactive but for that—Oh, there is my sister." Mrs. Carteray was approaching the house by the garden, with the evident intention of coming in by the low window. "She is one of the best of women. And have you heard that Cecil was here? So improved in looks; less bookish, and so aged, in a pleasant way; a beard to be proud of; sun-burnt, browned,—he was very ill when he went away, but he is as strong as a giant now. How do you do, dear?" to her sister; "what have you done with the carriage? Who is this?—Ah!"

Then Mrs. Carteray looked at Letty, and said welcoming words, and kissed her.

"They said Miss Teague was here," said Mrs. Carteray.

"So she was. But she has gone to her cottage, and left Letty to gossip with me. I have been telling her that you are always angry with me about poor Mary."

"Angry, am I? You are absurd about her, and were absurd from the beginning. Fancy answering an advertisement!" said Mrs. Carteray, looking at Letty Drake.

"No, but I did not!" cried Mrs. Baynard in explanation. "It was I myself who advertised, and she answered me. I advertised for a nursery governess, who would dress Laura and put her to bed, walk out with her, play croquet"—["Oh!" groaned Mrs. Carteray]—"make her dresses, after a pattern, of course, and talk French; and Mary answered my advertisement. She said she was a connection of that Geraldine Graham who had died at Mrs. Ferris's farm, and that Mrs. Ferris knew about her. I went to Mrs. Ferris. She said she had corresponded with these Canadian people ever since Geraldine's death, and that she knew about this girl. She had heard from her. 'She is a widow,' said Mrs. Ferris—'married one George Carter, a

man who went out there from England to seek his fortune. He was a very respectable man, and I expect he was one of a family well known to me and my departed husband where we lived, and where our farm was. Some such thing they seemed to say in one of their letters, and I knew his father by the same name very well."

"An excellent introduction," said Mrs. Carteray, and Letty could not keep back a smile. The mixture of pertinacity and simplicity in pretty Mrs. Baynard's character, with her intuitive sense of what would turn out well, did a great deal towards reviving old feelings in Letty's mind.

"Mrs. Ferris said that her last letter was in the tea-caddy, and I took it out of the tea-caddy and read it. I liked it very much," said Mrs. Baynard; "and Mary suits, and she is very pretty. The letter said that her baby was a year and a half old, and that she had been in England a year, I think. Then she put the child into a baby-house somewhere, and came to us. She is a model of propriety, and always wears black."

"Which is something, I suppose, in her favour," said Mrs. Carteray, maliciously. Then Mrs. Carteray went on to talk to Letty of Cecil, and Mrs. Baynard revenged herself.

"I think him so unaccountable," she said. "He is in this country now, and may be in Denmark to-morrow. He told Eustace that he wanted to go there. Have you heard of him since he left?"

"No," acknowledged Mrs. Carteray with humility. "But he has got his health restored, and been a great traveller and done a great deal of good."

"Oh! yes; he will be an historical personage. If he has been lost to his friends, he has been found located among the Indians. He has been at Quebec with some of the Huron tribe, and he has made himself useful as the interpreter of their feelings about their beavers. They make the warmest sort of cloak possible of their skins."

Mrs. Carteray tried to make a little gentle laugh serve for an answer. Letty rose to go.

"Cecil has, however, promised my father to come to him again, and be by his side once more after the hounds."

"He must make haste, then," said Mrs. Baynard. "Freddy can't be hunting much longer."

"Oh! we may see Cecil any day."

It surprised Letty to find that she had no feelings. Whether he went or came, it was all the same. For the sake of her own dignity, she thought she would not see him. She could go to town to her mother. But really she did not care. She walked back to Trederrick. Then she and Miss Teague dined at Coombe; and not till the next morning did she again begin her work.

"Perhaps I shall never feel any more," thought Letty, contemplating her own tranquillity with a calm, questioning surprise. "I once felt myself suddenly put out of the great noonday life, and left in the twilight, unseen, passed by—unseeing, too, and strangely still. Now it seems to me as if no thought could stir me in that deep serenity, and no name wake any echo in that world of shade. I think I am glad."





CHAPTER XLII.

LIGHT

With solemn consequence declared that none
Could judge that cause but Sophocles alone.

CHURCHILL.



LETTY was at her work again.

Alone in that room she opened the box, the examination of whose contents—being of interest chiefly, if not only, to herself—she had left to the last. She sat on a low footstool, with an ottoman by her, to be used for a table to suit her immediate convenience, and the basket into which she intended to throw those things which were meant for the fire within easy reach.

The first thing that her hand touched was her father's written account of all that had made his married life so wretched. He spoke boldly of this wretchedness, and he told the cause. He told it with all the faithful accuracy that belonged to his character.

He had written the whole story while Letty lay recovering from her illness six years before. He summed all up by saying, "I always looked on marriage as simply a legal contract. Your mother thought otherwise. I might have succeeded in discovering her feelings before I married her. I did not. So far as I may be thought to blame for that, so far I repent; and I desire my daughter to understand this, and to be my messenger to her mother."

Letty Drake's face grew white as marble. She read and read again. She understood everything now. She read of how the son by the first marriage had, through his step-father, claimed the estate. She read that never till then

had her mother known the truth, and she read how irreconcilable she had been under the knowledge. She read it once more. She grew cold from the effect of this heartless history on her nerves. What should she do or say? Could she—ought she to show this to Lady Judith? The single sentence speaking of his repentance, and giving its measure, she cut off. Then she put the scrap of paper carefully away, and burnt all that remained. She held it down among the flames. Its utter destruction she watched jealously, and then sat down and wondered.

Here was light. It seemed to be enough for that day. She left the room, locked the door, and went down into the village, to the poor, to their welcome faces and their homely speech.

She wandered down the sands, and let the cold winter air blow on her head, holding her hat in her hand, not asking for more light, but seeking dim places for her heart to rest in. "Oh, no more! I want never to know any more," she cried. "But I must give that paper to my mother, and tell her that I know. And then, on that matter, darkness and silence for ever."

She walked up and down close to the waves. They seemed to answer her with murmuring voices, and there was companionship in that inarticulate sorrow which they seemed to be sighing forth at her feet. She walked the hurry out of her heart. She stood still and thought of the all-seeing and omniscient God, and prayed.

Many days passed before Letty could take up her task again. She had written to her mother, and she had heard from her. The answer was brief. "Thank you for the paper. I believe I knew it. I am glad to know all; and you were right to give the record of the past to destruction. It is past. Remember; *it is not in your life any more.*"

"She is right. I will never think of it again if I can help it," resolved Letty. So with a renewed heart she recommenced her labours.

There were letters from learned men on learned matters, with her father's replies appended to them. There were observations of his own, written out with his peculiar correctness of diction and style—more of one—more of the other—and then? She knew the writing to be Cecil Carteray's. She read. He had asked her of her father. He had said that they loved each other. There it all lay before her; in good, honest, heart-reaching words; and her

father's answer was fastened neatly to it—this copy having been made with marked precision and neatness. She read it. She read how Cecil had been told that a marriage was arranged between her and Hugo Penwarne; how it had been made peculiarly desirable by the state of her father's affairs; how Hugo had been spoken to; how she, Letty, knew her father's wishes, and had said often that she could trust her life in his hands. Cecil was told that Lady Judith above all things desired this marriage, and that of her daughter's obedience and future happiness there could be no doubt. Cecil was told not to interfere with the lives of many for the sake of his own. He was told that he must go. No expressions that courtesy would allow of could be stronger than her father's words to Cecil. He was to leave them; he was not to believe that Letty was so attached to him as to be unhappy. Letty was quite willing to do what was unquestionably for her future good, and for every other person's happiness. Mr. Drake told Cecil that he was ill, that his life was not as good as his cousin's, and that it had been decided on both sides by this marriage to secure Frederick to Letty. *u*

The light had come again, and this time there was no place—cool, still, and shady in which to shelter herself. The old life had come back; the dead love had risen to life again, with terrible agonizing tears. She lay on the floor weeping; she dropped her arms across the box which had been the keeper of all this bitterness; and, kneeling, wept there tears which felt as if they came from a fount that could never dry.

All her hard, laborious girl-life, all her woman's dark, sunless days, Cecil's changed life, his altered character—the history of every grief lay before her. "Ah! that I had never known—that I could have died in that deep, dull peace!"

Her maid came to say that luncheon waited. But as she stood within the door, and saw that anguished kneeling figure, she went out speechless. "How she grieves!—how she loved her father!—how the sorrow is all waked up again!" she said to the old butler outside.

"Yes; Miss Drake was always father's child, you know," he answered. "We had better let her alone."

Hours passed, and then they brought her something. She rose up, took what they gave her, and said she was troubled and sad, and, and could not dine with Miss Teague. She would

go to her room ; and would Miss Teague come to her there in the evening ?

At a late hour Miss Teague came. She sat down by the fire, and began to work diligently. Letty smiled a sweet smile, though perhaps a sad one. "I have tired myself," she said.

"You are the

'Maiden with the meek brown eyes,
In whose orbs a shadow lies,
Like the dusk in evening skies.'"

said Miss Teague.

"I am glad my eyes are meek."

"I wonder what you have been doing."

"I have been making gifts—no," correcting herself, "making offerings, I think."

"And in what, to your mind, and with your present experience, lies the difference, if I may ask, between a gift and an offering?"

"It seemed to me as I spoke," said Letty "that people make gifts out of that which they have; but that we can make offerings of that which we have lost."

Miss Teague looked at Letty. It was a look more eloquent than speech.

On that subject Letty said no more; neither did she write to her mother; she thought that she would tell her one day, but she could not write. She could not disclose what her father had done, with the resolution and plainness that belongs to writing. One day she would tell it lightly—treat it as a mistaken act, meant in great kindness, however—as a thing of the past, a youthful affair, that had to be forgotten. If her heart bled, and went on through all life sore and suffering, she would never confess it. As far as she could manage it, the memory of Peter Drake should rest in unquestioning, blameless peace.

Her task was, after a few more days, quite finished.

"Now leave Trederrick and give your aunt and myself the solace of your company at Coombe. We will have Miss Teague too," said Colonel Penwarne. "And when your mother can tear herself away from new papers and fine curtains, I hope she will come too. But you are going to begin the season with a blaze, I am sure; and I don't think I approve of it."

"My mother likes to look beautiful," said Letty; "and I will gladly come to Coombe."

And so to Coombe they went, where a pleasant party were assembled in the house; for the coming week was to be a gay one, and the Marsland hounds were to meet close by, at the four cross roads above Trederrick village.

It was a most satisfactory thing to contemplate Mrs. Penwarne. Beautiful still, and in a very beautiful way. Forty-four—and who would have thought it? This reflection always followed the confidential discovery of the popular lady's age. It did the female world good. It took away the fear of age, and the sting that accompanies, in imperfectly regulated minds, the departure of youth.

Colonel Penwarne was *great*. He really had achieved that honourable greatness which excites everybody's admiration, and wakes no malice. People said that these two persons had begun life over again after Alice was married—perhaps because they had nothing to do but to bless each other, and the world around them. To Coombe, then; and to this admired and loved Aunt Jane, and Colonel Penwarne, Letty went, glad to change her life, and get from the old walls of Trederrick to the bright home of Coombe.

The weather had changed. It was well to have things bright inside, for the skies had become cloudy, and at last, in a great downfall of rain, fulfilled its worst threats.

"The house is well manned, ladies," said Colonel Penwarne, laughing. "I hope that may be consoling. The trouble of it is that our hunting-day may be the worse for it all. Suppose frost should set in? But it is bad management to be miserable on speculation."

There certainly was not any misery in the house. Many young girls were there, whom Letty had left in the school-room, and to whom she was kind and pleasant in a certain quiet, flattering way, that immediately exalted her into a favourite. All the men, too, whose presence Colonel Penwarne had pronounced to be comforting, admired and did her homage. Letty was beautiful to look at, delightful in her manner, and perfect in her dress. She was at ease, with a self-possession which put every one else at ease. And perhaps, unconsciously, she had the air of affecting to be older than she was—much older; quite an elderly lady.

It rained—and again, day after day, it rained; at last,

not grandly and stormily, and in a way to talk about, but in a stealthy, sulky, self-willed way, which it required some courage not to care for. But for the men it would have been much worse. Colonel Penwarne was right. They kept life going; and got alarmingly wet, shaking themselves outside the windows like great shaggy dogs, and making fun out of the melancholy absence of sunshine and blue sky. Then, in the house, there were driftings about—the gentleman to the ladies, and the ladies to them; for Colonel Penwarne had led a detachment into the smoking-room to see something, which, of course, no one saw, but the young ladies talked and laughed, mended somebody's gloves, sorted newspapers, and would have dusted the whole room with very small additional encouragement, to show their handiness, and give proof of how much such female craft was wanted. Then, to return these civilities, even Mrs. Penwarne's morning-room would be invaded by at least a favoured few, who were remarkably clever at supplying the necessary excuse. And there one morning came Captain Goodman, very splashed as to his outer man, and evidently with some worry on his mind, of which he wanted to be disburdened. There sat Mrs. Penwarne and Miss Teague, the last lady being intent on her knitting. She always, all through every winter, knits white woollen small shawls, with smart borders; and Colonel Penwarne had remarked that nobody had ever been told what became of them. She certainly knit for eight months out of the twelve, and in all places at all times; and she was knitting now. Letty was there in a brown velvet dress, braided and buttoned, and beautifully made; her nearly black hair twisted up in a great coil at the back of her stately-little head, despising the whole rubbish of stuffing and puffs. Captain Goodman had not seen Letty since she had left Frederrick with Lady Judith all those years ago. She got up and spoke to him. He answered her with evident awkwardness.

"Don't you know me?" she asked. "I am only grown older. How is Mrs. Goodman?"

Mrs. Goodman was quite well. She had sent him on a message to Mrs. Penwarne. Letty made an excuse to get three nice young girls to come with her. She knew they wanted to be alone. Miss Teague looked up from her work in profound astonishment.

"I am so sorry," began Freddy Goodman, "but Liza

and I were to come to-morrow to spend a few days—at least, she was to stay, and I was to come back for her.”

“Well, Freddy?” Mrs. Penwarne spoke in a tone of unmixed surprise.

“Well, she won’t; and I can’t blame her. She won’t stay in a house with Letty Drake, and be civil to her, with such anger in her heart as we have really a right to feel.”

“It is all a mystery to me. I do not even guess at your meaning. I should like Colonel Penwarne to hear this. I see him outside. Call him in, will you, dear Miss Teague.”

“Oh! certainly,” said Freddy. “Liza and I have talked it over, and I am very sorry. I have always loved you, Mrs. Penwarne.”

“Stop. Don’t say anything more. The love will never change, I am sure. There is my husband. My dear,” she said, “there is some odd misunderstanding about Letty Drake. In fact, Mrs. Goodman will not visit in the house with her.”

“At least, not just now,” said Captain Goodman.

“Now or never,” said Colonel Penwarne, promptly, holding out his hand. “What is the matter?”

“Mrs. Penwarne has called it a misunderstanding. But there is no misunderstanding matters of fact. You all know Cecil Carteray. Everybody knows how much we owe him. During my long absence in India, Cecil was just like a son to my dear old father. His conduct was perfect. He gave him love, duty, counsel. He worked for him. He was the one to entertain his leisure, to help him through his hours of business. No one can overestimate Cecil Carteray’s good deeds to us—to me,” said Freddy; “for I should often have been very unhappy while away if I had not known Cecil, and depended on him.”

“We grant you all that. Now, come to business,” said Colonel Penwarne.

“He was desperately in love with Miss Drake. He proposed, and was accepted. Heaven forgive her, but she behaved like a little viper. I have it all from his own lips. He never told it till the other day, when I went to London to arrange with him about coming down again; my dear old father had so set his heart upon it. He told it all easily enough. But it made me very angry. Letty Drake was

engaged to him, had told him, with the openness and truth of a good angel, how she loved him. Then he wrote to her father; and the answer assured him that a new thing had arisen—the only way to secure Trederick to her was to marry her to Hugo Penwarne. He was told that she placed her life in her father's hands; and Cecil was instructed to go. She broke up his life for the chance of keeping Trederick for her own. She was ready to sell herself to another man, while her own words were in Cecil's ears, saying how she loved him. Mr. Drake was, as we all know, a man incapable of falsehood. I saw his letter to Cecil. I declare that I never saw a stronger statement; and I never read a more powerful entreaty to a man than that which he made to Cecil to go away, and not break up their plans and their happiness, for that he was mistaken about Letty being faithful to him. She had placed her life in her father's hands."

"Have you any more to say?" asked Colonel Penwarne.

"Only this. Liza and I are the only ones who know of this—unless you know. Something of course you know, because as much was said in Mr. Drake's letter to Cecil. We—my wife and I—are so shocked at all this, that she is not up to the trial of meeting Miss Drake on the old terms."

"I like her sincerely. Freddy, will you take back this message to her? Tell her to wait, to restrain her judgment. We never heard till now about Cecil Carteray. As to Hugo Penwarne, I know, and we all knew at the time, that it was proposed to him to marry Letty. I told Peter Drake that if ever I inherited Trederick, it would be given to Hugo. On that matter I know no more."

"I am sorry to say that we do. It is impossible to respect Miss Drake."

Captain Goodman said this with exceeding bitterness. Mrs. Penwarne looked bewildered; and Miss Teague horror-struck.

Then Colonel Penwarne, standing where the strong light from the window fell straight on his fine face, turning his head towards Freddy, said, laying one hand on his wife's work-table:

"That right hand to a crown piece, my friend, that right hand would I willingly wager, to prove that Letty Drake never behaved ill to any man in her life. And if she recalled

her promise to Cecil Carteray, he well deserved it; and you may tell him so from me."

"It would be a dangerous message," said Captain Goodman, stiffly; and then Colonel Penwarne laughed.

It was evidently a struggle with Freddy. He could scarcely keep his temper. But he made an heroic effort, and said, "As to Cecil's behaving ill, or *deserving* a woman's displeasure—you don't know him."

"I know *her*," said the Colonel. "My grey hairs tell of long knowledge of human nature, during years when the judgment is clear, and the heart is cool. I don't want to say anything against Cecil. But if *one* is to blame, that one is not Letty."

Captain Goodman gave a ceremonious bow. "It is time to go," he said.

"Let us send for Letty," suggested Miss Teague.

"I have no right to cross-question Miss Drake," said Captain Goodman.

"Nevertheless, stay with Mrs. Penwarne while I go and speak to her."

When Colonel Penwarne left the room, his wife said:

"Freddy, I won't have any quarrelling."

"I think Colonel Penwarne one of the most delightful of mankind; but I won't stay in the house with that handsome, smooth-tongued deceiver. My admiration is so turned to bitterness, that I would rather never enter this house again. But you must forgive me——"

The Colonel walked in triumphantly. Letty was by his side. Her face was blooming like a rose; and there was a marvellous brilliancy in her eyes. By an effort of desperate strength, she contrived both to look and speak, almost as if the subject to be talked of was an indifferent matter.

"Oh! Captain Goodman," she said, "I am very sorry for any trouble to any one. It is an old story. I really believed till this last visit of mine to Trederrick, that Mr. Carteray had talked all through a pretty love-story with a very young and very inexperienced girl, and then thought it wisest and best to say no more. It is so many years ago now. But I have found his letter to my father, and my father's answer. All things considered, it was a very wise answer."

She smiled, and gave a quick glance at Mrs. Penwarne.

"However," she went on, "it is true that I never knew of

either the letter or the reply. I never knew of either—do you understand?”

“Yes. In fact, you thought Cecil false?”

“Yes; I suppose so. It is so long ago. Whatever girls of eighteen think, I thought, I imagine.”

“And you can talk quite lightly of what broke his life to pieces?”

“I can tell the truth—I have told it.”

“I have seen Mr. Drake’s letter. He distinctly says that you have declared to him that you would place your life in his hands.”

“It was an expression I often used to him—used to him in good faith. I never said it in any special reference to Mr. Carteray. But I am not going to discuss my father’s act. He used his judgment. I think we may say no more.”

In fact, she *could* say no more. Her strength was on the point of giving way. And Freddy, with his quick and sensitive nature, saw it all.

“I am very much obliged to you, Colonel Penwarne,” he said. “What day are we to dine here?”

“By-the-bye,” said that gentleman, “did you lose a five-shilling wager this morning?”

It was a treat to see the merriment that beamed from those honest eyes most mercilessly on Freddy.

“I should have lost if I had accepted it, you know.”

He looked round to bid Letty good morning, but she was gone.

“Is Carteray coming down?”

“He is at Marsland now.”

When he was gone, Mrs. Penwarne, in the understanding companionship of Miss Teague, made lamentation. “Poor Peter! oh, poor Peter!” she sighed forth softly. But Miss Teague’s thoughts were with Letty. It was to her as if a cloud had been lifted off the past—a cloud that had obscured so much, and made many things incomprehensible and indistinct.

She let her beloved Jane remain, for the only time in her life, without sympathy.



CHAPTER XLIII.

PEACE.

Yet stars for thee are bright
In midnight skies,
And tranquil words of light
Around thee rise.—FOSBERY.

IT was a great day in Letty's life. She had got herself safely out of the room, and safely and unseen into the privacy of her own apartment; but what was to happen next?

She did not know that Cecil Carteray was at Marsland; but she *did* know that he could not be too far off to be easily communicated with. He was within the limits of the united kingdoms somewhere. And he would know the truth. That was a great fact. The certainty of it made that day a marked day. For good or evil that day would have effect on her whole life; she was tremblingly sure of that. But Letty had gone through so much; her self-discipline had been so long endured that she could wait without any—actually without the smallest pain.

The question was before her—how would the knowledge of the truth affect Cecil; what would he feel, what would he do? But she knew, and the knowledge came without grief or any kind of distress, that time must have changed him in many things, and that it had certainly changed her. For the past never comes back to us. The events of time change every one. It may be "for worse," it is, let us believe, oftenest "for better," but still it is change; and those who for years have been drifting apart, and leading lives of such separate experience that the difficulties which have disciplined one could scarcely be comprehended by the other, must never think that they can meet once more, and be to each other what

the lookers-on would call "just the same." There is no "just the same" in this changing world.

Letty was young in years still, but she was old in knowledge. She had learnt to wait. She was able to look out into the future with calm eyes, equal to the steady examination of what might be coming to meet her. She was, in a sense, safe out of the reach of those pangs of disappointment from which she had suffered so keenly once. Once she had nearly died for Cecil Carteray. Very lately she had wept out all the tears she had shed at the discovery of how their lives had been parted. But now that the truth was known, and justice had been done to him and to her, she could wait. Something would come. No doubt she would see him. How would he appear to her disciplined intelligence? What would she be in her grave womanhood, to the man who had told his love to the timid trusting girl, with the worshipping heart and consenting brain?

By no bright effort of mind, by no amount of persevering consideration, could these questions be answered. Waiting would be working to Letty now. She knew it, and waited well.

But she wrote to her mother:

"You said you would come down if I wanted you. I think I do want you. Mother, I know the truth about Cecil. I cannot write it; but he was not wrong. It was all kept for me among my father's papers. I have had to tell the truth; and the truth I know will go to him. I am not either hoping or fearing. I am making no plans, expecting no change. We are two different people. The Cecil Carteray and the Letty Drake of years ago, exist no longer, it seems to me. And this is all that I seem to know. Yet, I want you to come to Trederrick, for if there is anything in the future I should meet it best by your side. So come down if you can, and write to Aunt Jane and summon me home. We have a very pleasant party in the house. I feel so old. Pretty girls of seventeen, just come out, whom I remember as children, are very fond of me, I think, and treat me quite respectfully."

Letty went down with this letter herself to the village post-office. She had a little plan about being away at luncheon time. Perhaps she should get a biscuit and a cup of milk at Mrs. Ferris's farm.

In truth her step was lighter, and her dark and beautiful

eyes saw more of heaven than earth. There was a real gladness within her, and her spirit seemed to be singing a song of praise. There had been no crime and no dishonour. Cecil had done no wrong. He was a true man, an honest self-denying man. A man who had believed himself ill-used and never complained; one who had been struck and had never returned the blow. She was very glad of that. "After all," she said in her heart, "there is no real evil where there is no sin."

Her spirit never once rose up against her father. It was not in her nature to blame him. He had acted to the best of his judgment. He had acted without knowledge. He had acted up to his rights. She felt all that, and never debated the question. Her tears—those unavailing tears which are the consequences of a fruitless regret—had all been shed. The part of her life on which she had never dared to look back, the dark place out of which the shadows grew, had become illuminated by most welcome light. The darkness of suspicion was gone; the heavy sense of wrong was departed; there had been much pain, but no treachery, much suffering, but no insult. The lips that had touched hers had never been closed in the cruelty of heart-wounding silence; the heart that had promised her faithful love had never lied.

These thoughts were enough for happiness, even if she should never see Cecil again—nay, more; even if, seeing him again, she yet should see one who had no desire to lose his freedom, or repeat past words. They were both free. They might sing their song of praise together. The evil thought had been taken out of their memories, and life was a rejoicing thing, and the world a better place, because Cecil had done no wrong.

Suddenly the thought of the burdened years of her life came upon her since that day when she had been struck down by sudden illness and shown the gates of death. Had that not been evil? Had it not been terrible—cruel? The question came across her mind so sharply that, as she was lightly, happily treading her way over the hardened pathway and though the winter air, she paused, standing still to answer it.

Had he not been made a sacrifice; had she not been the sufferer, the victim—and all for nothing; broken to pieces for a fancy, left like a wreck to make the folly of an unfulfilled idea?

"Oh, my sick heart, oh, my broken life, my days without a future, my close companion, patience! What you taught me; what strength to bear all things came to me through you. Ah! the treasure of that pain—oh, the golden glory of that abiding grief! I would not part with a particle of it," was her answer to herself. "I would not now have been without that discipline for any joy that I can imagine for myself."

She sprang forward on her way. Her life was bright within her. Her heart was rejoicing. She had lost the burden, but she had kept the strength that through it had come to her. Life was more than contentment and submission; it was a sublime thanksgiving.

She was so glad to be alone. She was glad, too, to stand there under the bright sky. It suited her new sense of freedom to be beyond stone walls, and away from human beings and their wants and luxuries. The cold breeze was welcome; the salt sea blessed her. Everything about and around her seemed to be in harmony with her unburdened spirit, her rejoicing strength. It was not like the return of youth to her. It was better than that. It was the perfecting of her womanhood in a world which had become glad and good. The bitterness had gone out of her life.

She was stopped in the middle of the village by a young woman, curtsying and begging her pardon with a proud happy smile.

"Oh, Ellen, you have your baby. What a pretty one! A great deal prettier than the boy we saw the other day."

"Well, miss, boys want fine limbs, and girls fine faces, they say. But the boy is a beauty in his father's eyes. We were all thinking, Miss Drake, that you'd come our way soon. It was but a few of us that saw you when you were last in the village, and you have been away an uncomfortable time."

"I could only spare time for a few visits. I came to Trederick to arrange some affairs. I came by myself to work hard and get things done. Now I am at Coombe; and soon I shall again be at Trederick. My mother is coming."

"And her ladyship is going to pack up, the servants tell me; she's out of her house, we hear, poor woman."

"Trederick goes to the male heirs. It is Colonel Penwarne's. We like that, you know."

"Well, 'tis all right. The men make the land; and they

were first upon it," says Ellen in a manner that meant to say she was stating facts beyond the reach of argument; "no doubt 'tis all right."

"There were very few changes in the years during which we were absent," says Letty.

"I don't know about that, miss. There was marriages, many of them; too many, some folks say. Dick Barton was only twenty-two, and Harriet, my sister, only seventeen. But they had had fine luck with the fish, and there isn't a cleaner girl in all England. Marchant Gedds, too, had an upper floor to let; and only old Jonathan down below. I did not see much harm in it myself."

"I am sure they did right," says Letty. "I shall go to see them."

"They won a sovereign last flower-show," Ellen says, "and they'll be very proud to see you;" and she smiled, quite sly with happiness, for she was very fond of her young sister; and "*some people*"—that mysterious family—had said Lady Judith would never approve of a school-girl being so forward as to marry like that.

The elder sister had watched for the happy moment when she could have the first word with Miss Letty.

"And then there was the man who came here and started opposition tea and sugar. It put us about sadly. And to think how the old Marchant, who has been so long content with penny profits, and prospered well, should be put to such a risk! If I wasn't ashamed to walk the streets! And the man was a branch, you know. He was sent from that great shop at Newton, and offered to start a miners' club for tobacco and shoes, and a woman's club also for the children's clothes, and tea, sugar, and blankets. I hate having temptations brought home to one like that. And while we are all in a turmoil they brought scarlet fever. Dear me, Miss Letty, didn't you know of it? I did hear it was even printed."

"Yes, I heard something; but we were a long way off, and where a different language is spoken."

"It must be very ill-convenient," remarked Ellen. "But when it came to the fever, then Colonel Penwarne stepped in. It was very queer premises; had once been a barn. He bought it there upon the spot; turned everything and everybody out as quick as quick could be, and lighted a tar barrel one calm night, and burned it all to ashes. There was no 'ifs' nor 'buts' in his mouth. And when he heard

the things they had offered, he said, 'Well, have them. If such things are good, organize them yourselves, and your calculations can be corrected by one who knows more than we do.' And so we have our clubs—yes, indeed! The Colonel was so straight and ready and powerful; and no peradventure about it," Ellen declared with emphasis.

"We are all proud of Colonel Penwarne," said Letty, saying good-bye, and leaving Ellen to tell her neighbours how Miss Drake was the same dear humble lady, but more lively and pleasant than ever. And it "was very natural," the people said, to have them at home once more.

Letty got down to the waves. They came in merrily at her feet, crowned with sparkling foam, and making music. She stood on a point of rock whose dark sides were glittering like marble, and in whose crevices, where it rose at her back, the sea-pink grew and looked out across the level of blue waves, far off to the bluer sky that came down to meet them. All was calm and clear, and the sun, with a steady light, brightened the vast expanse that sunk and swelled with a gentle motion, as if it were being rocked to rest and peace. She came down from her point of observation. She looked about with loving eyes, welcoming each little landmark, and making friends again with the things she had known from her birth, and from which she had been parted so long.

She was at peace with the whole earth. All these things, on which she had looked in her hour of trial from what had seemed to be the chamber of death, had once, in their silent sympathy, been to her as the witnesses of Cecil's perfidy, but now they bore testimony to his truth.

She came up the path towards Miss Teague's orchard, and passed the hedge-rows of tall elms—those speechless trees whose beckoning branches had seemed once to say merciful things to her when, destitute of human sympathy, she had looked through their pencilled outlines to the blue waters beyond, and let her sad eyes and silent tears tell her unuttered story. They might see her smiles now, they might point pleasantly to her unburdened heart, for she passed under them free—free! It was the sense of freedom that blessed her; the present sense of heavy chains dropped off—the chains that bound her to a dead past, from which she could never separate her life, but which now were gone for ever.

Miss Teague's cottage looked still and lonely, but the

laurustinus trees were full of budding flowers, and the red berries had not all fallen from the arbutus close by. Prinking little bantams stepped up and down daintily, and gave themselves all imaginable airs; the favourite white Persian cat, too well educated to interfere with its feathered companions, watched them with blinking eyes. That little tyrannical dog Dandy came forward with the utmost hospitality, every inch a gentleman, to welcome her; and Letty sat down on a granite step, the "upping stock" of former days, and graciously accepted his civilities. Here she rested; and—as it is so good to do sometimes—here she played a little with life, and thought herself in excellent company. But the faithful maid-servant had to be called, and Dandy, whose obedience was not to be reckoned on, had to be shut up out of the temptation which the company of Letty might be to him, and she went on alone to Mrs. Ferris and the Cot farm.

"'Tis a sight for old eyes," the good woman cried, as Letty came up to the wicket gate. "My dear, I'm mortal glad to see thee. Step in. I only just cast eyes on ye t'other day. But you have been busy at the great house. Miss Teague—Heaven bless her!—told me. She's a heart-healer. I had begun to wonder and long after you. Old age is exacting, you know—and a heart-healer is she," repeated Mrs. Ferris, wiping her spectacles, and replacing them with an exhibition of great care; "my dear, come in; sit down; let me look at you." And the spectacles had to come off again, and the glasses had to be repolished with a yet greater degree of nicety.

"Yes, here I am at last. And you reward me for staying away by your welcome when I come. But, Mrs. Ferris, I'm hungry. I shall miss luncheon at Coombe, unless you turn me out of the house immediately."

"Bless her heart!" The old woman laughed with enjoyment. "Here, Phillis—the other one is gone—married; and married pretty decent too. You'll like to hear about that—Phillis, the yesterday's loaf, and butter; and the apple, and some cream."

"Thank you," said Letty. "I like all the best things very much."

"You are just the old happy heart out on a holiday, that you used to be before that illness took you, and the other troubles came."

"Yes, I am just the same. I feel as if I were here, as I

used to be, on the twenty-ninth of May, to see you gild the oak leaves for the best boy in the school."

"That's right," said Mrs. Ferris. "That is how it should be. Where the grief comes from, there the grief goes. We are not meant to keep it in our path for ever, with eyes cast down, and sorrowing footsteps. Look up; look up; I've had to do it many times. Geraldine used to say things to me well worth minding. She would pick a few words out of her poetry books, and say them again and again. After she was gone, I was surprised to find how they stuck about the place, staying like echoes among the old walls. She used say to me, 'When I am gone you will not be long troubled. You will learn the meaning of these words—"Those tears eternal that embalm the dead"—but such are not wept out of the eyes, you know.' And that is true. The work went on. But her memory is as green as the meadows in a perpetual spring. Then there was such a visibly strong hand in it," said Mrs. Ferris. "Geraldine had a life annuity. She had money too; and she had saved. When the lawyer made her will, she laughed because he provided for the possibility of the boy dying first. And yet he did. And so it was that the money she had got of her own, was divided, and half was left to me, and the other half to those Canadian people; which they got, and seemed surprised and thankful. They'll be more so by-and-by, for I only touch the interest of her legacy, and I have left them my share too; for, my dear, you must know those folk out there, are true born ladies and gentlemen. They are, indeed. But they all came down in the world, with a kind of a run somehow. My husband's mother was a Graham, so was his first wife—cousins, they were. With them, and Geraldine's husband, died off all of the sort in this country. But one had had extra courage, and had gone off to Canada to work, and build themselves up a bit; and he did it too. And they took to Geraldine, liking her letters, and knowing from them what kind she was of. And their offers for poor little Joe was good and true,—and how she worked to make him their equal—but he had a better home in store, and went to it, by a call that allows no choice."

Here Phillis came in with the pleasantest of repasts. A rose-bud decorated the pot of cream, and the little tray was placed on a small round oak table covered with snowy damask. Mrs. Ferris did the hostess's duty, and Letty ate with an appetite.

"It does me good. There's nothing so good as the sweet face that you wear to-day, Miss Letty. Is it all as you like?"

"I think I never liked anything so much ever before. But please to go on talking. I have been many years away, remember; and even Miss Teague's letters could not tell one everything. Have you heard from Geraldine's Canadian friends?"

"Why, yes; and have you seen Mary—poor Mary? She who is at Mrs. Baynard's to teach the child."

"Yes; I saw her. But only from the window. Mrs. Baynard is quite fond of her."

"Sure to be. She is a real good one; and she is very well-favoured. I feel proud of her, I assure you. But there's trouble again. Eh, the world's full of it!" said Mrs. Ferris, almost impatiently. "Her father wrote to me and said George was a young man from the old country, and like to make his daughter happy."

"And did he die?" asked Letty.

"Die?" repeated Mrs. Ferris with a show of irritation that brought back old times to Letty till she smiled—"Yes; why not? She said she lost him. Was I going to ask if he was dead after that? She would not lose him alive, would she? Dead! Why, Mrs. Carteray comes speering about the man, and says, like you, did he die? He was a very respectable man. What else should he do? He was very respectable, or her father would not have written as he did. What else could he do but die, thinkest thou?"

Letty apologized. "Oh, I'm not thinking of you. But Mrs. Carteray came speering;"—this was Mrs. Ferris's word for inquiry in an antagonistic sort of manner. "And why should I be responsible? Those Grahams are as good as anybody about here take their pedigrees; and as to education—poor Mary can be put on her examination; but I don't keep their family registers, nor Mrs. Carteray's either. I had to tell her so, I assure you," she said, calming down—"I had to tell her."

"She is very pretty," said Letty.

"They were all handsome. I'll say that for them, and include my husband in the same, and his first wife, whose picture was over the fire-place, and destroyed by accident when the chimney fell in—'twas a rubbishing old house—but fine land."

"I have made such a good luncheon," says Letty.

"I'm proud to hear it. Keep it in mind, and try it again."

But have you seen Mr. Cecil? He's a greater stranger than you were. But he sat in that arm-chair yesterday, and I was glad to see him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, he'd been good to me, you know, when he was a wanderer. Mostly, I don't like wanderers. But you will mind that Captain Hugo and Miss Alice were married close on those deaths, on account of the Indiaman sailing. So Mr. Baynard, who knew where Mr. Cecil was, wrote to him, and told him all about things; and asked him, if ever he wandered near the Grahams to go and see them. He sent me a note through Mr. Baynard, just before he came home—he has been home, or, anyways, in England, a good bit, but I never saw him before—to say he had seen them, and had many things to tell. It did me good, for I truly loved Geraldine. But when he sat there yesterday, he had little to say, except as to the country, which must be very fine. But I saw him up in the churchyard, and I think he has a feeling heart. It is years ago since he saw them, I suppose, and he had forgotten, no doubt. I said nothing of poor Mary. I suppose he went to Mr. Baynard's, but I can't tell; and if he did, he would not see her. I purposely never spoke of her. It would have been like an expecting of him to notice her, which would not have been seemly, you know. But he'll know in time. He has promised those happy young souls at Lerrins to pay them a visit—he told me so. 'When Captain and Mrs. Penwarne come to Trederrick,' he said. Then I made bold to answer him—'And are your old friends forgotten?' I asked. 'Old friends,' said he, 'make way for friends who are just as old, sometimes!' 'Well,' I said, 'I think it's right.' And the Captain has children. They must have selfish hearts who can't rejoice over children's voices at old Trederrick. But Mr. Cecil is altered—very much altered," said Mrs. Ferris, finishing her gossip, as Letty put her hat on, feeling that she had heard a great deal—for she had not been in the room when Captain Goodman had spoken of Cecil being at Marsland—"He's changed. People can't go up to the Arctics one time, to San Francisco another, and not be altered. Then he was with Injins, and then with English—here and there—but he has such a steady way with him. Such a man he is, not a bit of the boy left—I've known him many years, you understand. And his eyes so mild, and penetrating, somehow; and his beard so fine. Oh, he's a grand human creature; and I liked to look at him."



CHAPTER XLIV.

TRUST.

What is our bliss, that changeth with the moon,
And day of life, that darkens ere 'tis noon?—PRIOR.

ANOTHER and another day passed at Coombe. Letty's satisfied heart was still calmly resting in its new and grateful peace. Colonel Penwarne had talked to his wife, and found her, as usual, engrossed by a love-story.

"How little we know of anything!" she exclaimed. "I declare it is terrible. We never understood our own child. We knew positively nothing of Letty. Here has been a man's life ruined, a girl's existence perilled——" "Oh the world's a dreadful place," said Colonel Penwarne—and "all's well that ends well," ejaculated Miss Teague.

"Nevertheless we do not know the end," said the Colonel.

"Oh, I could not doubt Cecil," cried his wife.

"But, my dear Jane, I thought that, in your code of morals, not honour, but love was lord of all."

"Why not unite them?"

"They are sometimes antagonists."

"And that is exactly what ought to be provided against."

"Once I thought so, and proposed last spring to marry Hugo and Alice in three weeks, and you insisted on giving them all the anxieties of a love-story, and risking the breaking of their hearts."

"Well," she said, "I really don't know what to do."

"We have nothing to do. I have found one daughter quite trouble enough. And I suspected that Letty has

suffered enough to know now how to take care of herself."

Which was quite true. She was undisturbed. She was the pleasantest guest they had in the house. Her popularity already great, grew with surprising rapidity. In forty-eight hours, every man and every woman, of every age and taste, was ready to declare that her fascination increased every moment—she was a wonder among women, and they all felt spell-bound. On the second day she had an answer to her letter to her mother.

"I am coming to Trederrick, my dear child; and as you will get this letter to-morrow morning, I will hope to be with you in the evening. Ask your aunt to spare you to me, though at so short and unceremonious a notice; and perhaps you could order dinner at seven. A dinner for three, dear Letty; a dinner to ask a man to; for Cecil Carteray is here—actually in the room at this moment, and he will be my escort home; and we must give him some food before he walks by night, by the cliff path, to Lerrins, which place he left yesterday. He is changed; but you know I never saw many faults in him, and I can, I find, put up with him as he is. He is grown—it is quite true, I am sure. He has got the better of all over-civilization, and scorned a carriage when I talked of sending him home. Have I raised your curiosity? He will be glad to see his old friend. I can promise you that."

Letty took the letter with a very steady countenance to her aunt. That aunt, true to her character, quite trembled as she read it. Diamond drops were glittering in her beautiful eyes as she gave it back, with an—"Oh, my dear Letty!" and a very trembling voice.

"If you please, don't!" said Letty, and kissed her; "I declare that I am sorry to go. We have such a pleasant party, and everybody is so civil to me. I am beginning to like *receiving attentions*."

"But it will be pleasanter soon."

"Dear good prophet, thank you. Thank you, Aunt Jane; how kind you have always been to me!"

How the hours passed, who can tell? The dinner was ordered. Up and down the crag path fleet footsteps were often going that day. Everybody wanted to be a help to Miss Drake. Every one had last words, and would have asked for last walks, and last interviews, if human strength could have borne so much. But at last she was at Tre-

derick, and alone. At Troderrick with shutters closed, curtains drawn, and lamps lighted, waiting. For a moment she wished that she might have had a little—yet a little more time.

The wheels of the carriage were heard on the hard gravelled drive; there was an opening of doors, a running of servants; Letty walked out to the hall to meet her mother, trying to be ready with a strong and an unselfish heart to meet Cecil. It was a supreme moment in her life. She knew it, and felt it through every nerve. But the carriage had stopped, and she had caught sight of the dim figure of a man—she was in her mother's arms.

Then—before the old man-servant, before the man who had travelled with them, in the presence of the good old housekeeper, with the knowledge of other eyes near, and other listeners waiting, she said—"How do you do, Mr. Cartoray?"—and he had her hand in his, but he never spoke.

It was as if life had travelled back. What was all she had suffered, all she had lived through?—what was anything in the sad past to her at that moment? Had not his coming back obliterated all memory of grief, and his presence there made all life happy. She never doubted him. Once more all his old power over her came back, and yet she had scarcely seen his face, and actually he had never spoken to her.

In a few minutes, after some ceremonies about which Letty's intelligence seemed to know nothing, and by some process of which she knew as little—they were all three in the morning-room, which, being smaller and snugger than the drawing-room or library, Letty had used lately. It was all bright with a good fire; the wood blazed cheerfully, with a welcome in its crackling notes. Those three stood there alone, and Lady Judith asked her daughter if she should have known her guest.

"Everybody says he is altered," she replied—then, looking up in his face, "and I suppose you are."

"Don't suppose it," said Cecil; and then she saw in him the Cecil of past days, the one most to be admired and loved of all on earth.

"It is late. We must go. You must be shown to your room, Cecil—come with me. Be in my dressing-room in five minutes, please, Letty," said Lady Judith. And so she was left alone.

What was he like? Was he really changed? He was not—surely he was not as handsome as he once was. The image of the Cecil Carteray of six years before rose to her memory plainly, and Letty, gazing into the fire, laughed. This man was a thousand times handsomer than that one. And yet she did not care for beauty—good looks were girlish things. Nevertheless there was a mysterious beauty about Cecil now—in her heart she thought it was too visibly a supernatural work to be talked of or described. It was the temper of the man, tried and purified in many fires, that showed like a story in his face, full of kindness, worship, and truth.

She went to her mother's room.

"Well, darling!" Lady Judith took her in her arms. "I know nothing. He has said nothing. He only walked in where I was sitting, as if he had really annihilated time and space, and would ignore all events but one. He held your father's answer to his letter in his hand. You have seen the copy?"

"Yes, mother."

"I read what he gave me to read; and when he asked me to speak to him, I could only reply that I could not help it. It had not been my doing. I had nothing to say. That I was guilty of nothing worse than wishing for Hugo as a son, which was a wise wish—as long as it was a possible one."

"Then he never asked about me."

"I told him what had occurred at Norwood. He asked if it were possible that you could love him still. I said you were most unlikely to have gone on loving a man who must have appeared to you as the vilest of hypocrites, the most impertinent of human beings. He asked if he should have a fair chance with you now. I said he had grown a beard, and was so changed. How should I know? Would he dine with us here, to-day, at seven? Then he laughed his old laugh. I always used to like him, and he always pretended to have a regard for me. It amused me to hear that laugh and to make him talk again. He talks capitally. He asked what he should do, and I bid him go and marry one of those old women who were so much benefited by the will case he won for them. Now go and make yourself beautiful. How handsome you must look after the Hurons! But that was some time since. He has been in Denmark and Norway, and is generally supposed to be under an

impression that a man ought never to stay two nights in one place. He came up to town to show me those letters, because Freddy Goodman had told him something; he came down with me, because he hunts to-morrow, to please old Sir Harry. He will go up in a balloon, I should think, if you say so;—so take care how you provoke him."

Letty went away smiling, and silently.

The short time before dinner was occupied by Lady Judith's questionings. She wished to save Letty all awkwardness. She felt in her heart that those two could not speak small nothings to each other as if they were really only common acquaintances. Whether the end was to be yes or no, they must tell out their story once, and immediately.

The dinner was announced, and they went to the dining-room, and so the next hour passed away.

They had left him alone, and were again together. "You must see him now and let him speak, Letty. I am going away."

Letty never debated the matter. She was perfectly quiet. Not a nerve trembled. It was a moment full of solemnity. What might come she did not know. She heard her mother's departing footsteps. She knew she was alone. She sat full of the thought of how time had passed, and what time had brought her to. The moment of which she had not known, the great moment that the future had held all along through the sad, the suffering, the amazed, the patient past, had come—it had come. So she thought and felt; so all other thoughts and feelings were swallowed up in that one absorbing fact—*it had come*.

She heard a footstep, and she knew whose it was. She never looked up, but he had drawn a chair to her side, and had sat down.

"Letty, our life, that was once so dear to us, was snatched away—might it come back again?" She never spoke. "As far as that is possible, might it be?" She was dumb, but he was not misunderstanding her. "If it could ever be—and with me those hopes are now revived with a force that is not easily controlled—if it could be, then, first, before I asked for a word from you, I must tell you much. Could you listen to me?"

She raised her eyes to his face. She looked steadily at him, and he as steadily returned her gaze.

"I was never untrue," he said—"you know that—you

know all. There is no need of explanation. But you can never know, nor am I going to try to tell you, the pain of the rending apart of life and its best hope. I had, as it were, consecrated myself to you. In you I saw my love, my duty, my work, my reward. Never mind that now. I struck out a new way; I sought a new life; I went into a different world. But, Letty, a man's history never stands still. Mine did not. The story of my life you must have before you speak. If you are determined already that I shall never be more than a friend, I need not tell you."

"But I *must* hear, Cecil. I am not afraid to hear," she said.

"Neither am I afraid to tell," he answered; and she saw how his honest eyes kindled, and in her heart she admired his beauty, if beauty he had, which she doubted; only it was beauty to her, and goodness, and strength, and truth; and even in that moment she smiled, remembering how Mrs. Ferris had once said, "The best men are never the handsomest."

"I come to you, Letty, not as the same man—not even in my love the same. I will love you better than before, and more loyally than I ever could have loved you, if we had never parted. It is not only the living man that grows, develops, and strengthens as time gets on, and brings him hard work to do; the will gets firmer, the heart more courageous, the desire deepens; he becomes brave and wise; he learns where to yield, and when to conquer. Those lessons I have learnt, and in a hard school—in loneliness, among strangers, where I have, with my own hands, and of my own will, for my strength, for my cure, worked my way, and won my bread. So I am another man, ready to be as fond and as true; less easy to be rid of—Have I said enough for this first time? Will you think of it all? and to-morrow, when I ask if I may tell my story, your answer shall be enough for me. I have not a thing to say to you that I shall shrink from telling, yet I have that to say which you *must* hear."

"Let all that be as you will. The old trust has come back," said Letty.

Lady Judith wanted him to stay with them, but Cecil would not. The next day was the great hunting-day, and the meet was so near that Lady Judith thought him wrong to leave the house. But he had promised Sir Harry. .

"I breakfast at Marsland to-morrow," he said. "I must keep my word. Let me come here after the day's work. Don't wait dinner, but let me come when I can."

Then he put on a wonderful coat in the hall, and stood there, with a stout oak stick, saying they must come to him—he could not bring his shoes into the drawing-room. They wished him good night in the hall. Letty could look at him, speak to him, smile in his face, as in old times. He took her hand in his, and held it a moment while he spoke to her mother. He gave her one sweet glance of such happiness as made her heart beat. He was gone out into the night, under the bright stars, meeting the clear frosty air; he was to her the pattern of all that was good and most to be desired. Joy had come—such joy!—such brightness! The sun in splendour had penetrated into her shade. It seemed to her that he was ten thousand times better worth loving than the Cecil Carteray she had known before. The words he had said, the manner of his saying them, had revealed so much. Her whole spirit gave thanks. Her heart was buoyant—her life was crowned.

Very seldom is it given to anybody to feel as Letty felt. It can only be where there has been deep suffering. It is what it is because it is the rebound after pain. To Letty the end had come, and the beginning. The beginning and the end had met; the pain had got lost in the pleasure, and the pleasure had got perfected in the pain. There were only a few hours between her and the words which were to satisfy and make sure the bliss of life to both of them. To-morrow; that sweet to-morrow! The anticipation was so happy, the certainty so sweet, she could not grudge the waiting. She felt like one hugging the happy hours, telling them not to pass too hurriedly. She liked to enjoy the great calm of the moment, and to look forward to the confidence that would see her possessed of the knowledge of his past, and trusted with his future. So the night passed and the morning came; the morning shining on a renewed world, a renovated life, *a future*.

Up rose a merry world too for a hunting holiday. Dear old Sir Harry was in the saddle, people said, and the Captain, that best of sons, and most accomplished Master of Hounds, was in his place, on the most promising of days, and among an admiring assemblage of mounted and unmounted lovers of the chase.

The meet—the cross-roads—was just beyond the gate of the carriage-drive that led to Mr. Baynard's house. It was always something of a holiday when the meet was there.

Pretty, young, chattering Laura was an ardent admirer of hunting and hounds. "Oh, there will be quantities of men, and all in red coats," she said to "poor Mary," who listened with gentle smiles, slightly suggesting, just for propriety's sake, that the conversation must be conducted in French once more, when the excitement of the coming hour should be over.

As soon as there was any chance of anything worth seeing, the whole party were out on the gravel walk; and Mrs. Baynard, who had taken the greatest possible fancy to her young governess, and felt quite proud of the success of that negotiation, could not help looking at her protégée with admiration.

Simple and elegant her manners and gestures were, certainly; her printed black and white dress fitted her form to perfection; she put on her clothes like a Frenchwoman, and was as quiet and reserved as the most severe of English gentlewomen could desire. As Mrs. Baynard was not severe, she yielded, every day, more and more to the fascinations of her new friend, and excused herself, though no excuses were necessary, by saying that she had already done Laura an amazing amount of good, and that the child was exceedingly fond of her.

Now, though they had thrown the early lessons aside to see the sight that Laura had described, there was only the postman.

It made them laugh. But there was a letter from across the Atlantic for Mary, and she took it with delight—that calm delight which meant so much.

She opened the letter, standing quite still in the glittering road. Mrs. Baynard looked at her. The girl's pale face grew red, and pale again, and there came a sound from her white lips, whether of praise or blame, whether of sorrow, fear, or rejoicing, it was impossible to guess; but from the very depths of her being it came, and she folded the letter together, evidently before she could have read the whole, and put it away.

"My dear! It is not bad news?" whispered Mrs. Baynard. Mary's eyes were full of the strangest light, and tears were trembling in them.

"No, no. I will tell you all. Kind, trusting heart——" and she held out her hand and clasped Mrs. Baynard's closely.

"The horn, the horn!" cried Laura eagerly. A bright smile from Mary seemed to set Mrs. Baynard free. She wrapped her shawl more closely round her, and followed her child to the gate, leaving Mary, who looked as if in captivity to some great idea which had completely mastered her.

A group of mounted horsemen made the little lawn, and the great space round the group of oak that marked the centre of the cross-roads, quite gay. Mrs. Baynard was a universal favourite, and her husband was in the midst of the scene.

Everybody knew them, and they knew everybody.

There was Cecil Carteray, splendidly mounted, looking about him, and recognizing one glad face after another—high and low, rich and poor, all ready to make friends.

The gate of the pretty entrance was left open for the convenience of those whom the Baynards knew, and who preferred the ladies and the sunshine to the shadow of the high hedge and the oak trees round which the hunters were congregating, and adding every five minutes to their numbers.

"Oh, Cecil, I am so glad to see you!" cried Mrs. Baynard. "And, Freddy, how do you do? Where's my father? Take care of Laura; oh, please don't ride so close."

But Laura was incorrigible. She was everywhere, and in every possible position of danger. Under one horse's neck with a rush, to escape the being knocked down by another, and taking refuge with screams and laughter at the heels of a third.

It made Mrs. Baynard wild to see her.

"Oh, take care of the child. Laura, my darling. I am so glad to see you; please take care. How is Mr. South—good gracious, the child!—I heard your mother was at Marsland—Laura, you'll be killed. Somebody please to ask that great man on the prancing horse to keep out in the road. Oh, I know something will happen—where's Mary?"

It was agonizing. Laura had so many friends. Laura tried to keep possession of a favourite horseman, and to arrest both himself and his steed by holding fast by his stirrup leather; then Mrs. Baynard cried so anxiously for

"poor Mary," that she came, and was there in the midst of everybody in a moment.

Suddenly there was a general movement, cries to be off. the hounds would find in the cover close by. Mary, stooping, seized the infatuated Laura, and looked up in the face of a red-coated hunter with whom the child had been speaking—she dropped upon her knees, to bring herself nearer to the child's height, perhaps. She looked up straight into Cecil Carteray's face—perhaps to entreat him to move with care, and have mercy on Laura. But there she knelt with her arms round the child, and her up-turned face, on which the clear light of day was gleaming, her mouth half opened with unuttered words, and her eyes fixed—full of a wild surprise, a boundless wonder. She knew him; but, in some unguessed at way, her recognition was united to an astonishment that seemed to deprive her of all power, and turn her into stone. She made a movement forward, as if to stop Mr. Carteray—as if to ask an explanation. The lips moved; but, with her eyes still fixed on him, all she said was "Go."

He wheeled his horse round quickly; the creature sprang under the needless spurring he inflicted on it. The sudden action of the horse made an instant confusion among the riders, who had not left the carriage drive; there were cries of "What now, Carteray?" "Why, what's the matter?"

Mary said "Carteray" like one speaking in her sleep: but in another moment she was standing quite still, pale as marble, holding Laura by the hand, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

"It is always such a pretty sight," said the unconscious Mrs. Baynard, walking towards the house. "But, Laura, you are much too rash. You frighten everybody; you must be quieter, dear child."

"Mamma, may I go out and see them again?" said that young lady. "Cecil says he knows where the fox will go; he is quite sure to go through Mrs. Ferris's farm, and try to get in where all that furze grows on towards Gwylyter. If we go to the high ground above the farm, where those four great elms grow, we shall see them all come out of the wood, and go across the home-park, and down the slope to the level field at the back of the farm. May we go?"

"You may ask Mary, dear. I can't have her dragged

Then, below them, through the flat meadow-land went the hounds, as by one consent taking one way; and immediately over a low place in the hedge came one rider after another. The hounds went round at the back of Mrs. Ferris's, and out through her orchard to a corner of coppice, which hid them all from view. The riders passed before the watcher's eyes for a minute or two like a moving picture, and then, for two or three minutes, and there was no more to see.

At the end of that brief space of time, some of those riders who had been left behind were seen galloping furiously through the peaceful meadow below—but not Cecil. Laura was in despair. Her favourite would be irretrievably disgraced.

"There; that is all," said Mrs. Baynard. "Now we will go down this steep field, pay a visit to Mrs. Ferris, and ask if she has any fresh eggs. You must be careful, Laura. Let us take the hill-side slantingly. It is very slippery. Give me your hand. Pray take care."

But Laura, light and fleet of foot, refused to be led. She got on before the others; and Mrs. Baynard and Mary, making the descent more carefully, had just got to the fence on the right, and were turning to make their next angle, when, close to them, there came a cry to tell them to take care, and a rush on the other side of the hedge. A horse cleared the fence bravely—stumbled and slid—recovered himself with a scramble on the sloping ground, and then went down the hill side at a pace that looked terrible. His rider was scarcely more than a boy. Mrs. Baynard stood still, startled, and afraid to move.

Then, once more, the same sound came, and the same leap was taken. But this time the horse carried no boy's weight; the rider was Cecil Carteray, and the horse on the slippery ground fell. He fell with his rider; he rose, with that rider; fell with a terrible slide, and rose with his rider entangled with stirrups and reins; the beast kicked out desperately; dragged the man a few yards, then kicked himself free somehow, and was down the hill and through an open gateway in the Cot Farm orchard with lightning speed. Laura crouched to the earth behind the gate, half dead with fear, for she knew the horse, as she had said. The animal was out of sight in a moment.

Mrs. Baynard gave one eager look, and ascertained her child's safety—that was her first thought. She saw the

little red cloak rise from the ground, and Laura stood upright; and she signified by a wave of her hand that she was to stay where she was. Her next glance showed her Mary on her knees, with Cecil's head on her shoulder.

She went to her quickly. Neither of them spoke for a moment. There was no need for words. Sight was enough, and they both knew that Cecil was dead.

All over poor Mary's arm and breast the blood was flowing, steeping her dress, staining her neck; and she, with mild, tearless, solemn eyes was looking in his face, while Mrs. Baynard turned away in an agony of grief and sobbed aloud.

"Did he speak?" she gasped out.

"Yes; once—thank God, yes; once."

"What are we to do?"

"Go down to Mrs. Ferris. Get men—a shutter, a gate—anything. He must be carried somewhere."

Mrs. Baynard obeyed the calm, untrembling girl. She left her, doing exactly as she had been directed to do.

Men came. Mary had never moved. Then they saw that the dead man's hand had clasped her by the wrist—she heaved a convulsive sort of sigh when they parted them. No one now gave any orders—Mrs. Ferris had directed them. They walked away with their burden, Mary following; and they carried him across the pastures to the road leading to Frederrick; then in by the back way, and to the door which opened close to the room where Miss Teague used to sit, when she was "lady housekeeper," in the old days. Servants met them—there were words said hurriedly—no questions asked. The great fact filled the moment, and was enough for the time. They opened that door where she and Jane had sung their duets together, and the shining river of time had brought on its flowing waters a wreath to Letty; a dark-stained wreath of Immortelles.

"Where is Lady Judith?" asked Mary.

"Here."

"Madam, I take God to witness that I am his wedded wife, and the mother of his son. Let every one understand me. We were not parted. I was not deserted. In a way which I will explain another time, it came to pass that he believed we—my child and I—had both perished. But he knew me with his dying eyes, and blessed me with his latest breath. One name he mentioned as referring me to

her who bore it; so I read in his parting glance. Madam it was yours."

"I am glad of it. I have been his friend since boyhood." That was all Lady Judith said, but the gaze she fastened on the dead man's face would have said to any one capable of deciphering its language a great deal more.

In a marvellously short time Mrs. Carteray was come. How much did she know?—what did she believe? Lady Judith put these questions gently but plainly, with Letty in the room to hear.

"I knew he had been married," said Mrs. Carteray. "You remember the great will-case, which no one but Cecil seemed to understand? A death had occurred; a claimant to some part of the property had arisen; there was a great desire expressed to see Cecil, or to possess his notes and memoranda. I knew he intended to come to England for a short time. I suppose I wrote very strongly; but he came, leaving his wife behind, whose child had not very long been born. He then told me, for the first time, of his marriage, and of the birth of his son. He never told me that he had been known by the name of Carter. He never said who his wife was. People must have ignorantly called him so. He, disgusted with the old life, and broken to pieces by the trouble he had gone through—alas! alas!" And Mrs. Carteray—who had learnt the truth—stiff and strong, and long-enduring as she was, and not the least given to be sentimental, at this point of her narrative quite broke down.

"Never mind that," said Letty, with calm distinctness. "I have no quarrel with the past; neither, I am sure, at last, had he."

"Cecil was very fond of his wife, and delighted with his boy. But, partly because I had been so urgent with him, and partly, as he told me, to prepare a proper place, and a proper reception for his wife—he sailed, before her—leaving everything prepared for her and the child to come in another ship. He had never revealed to her his real place in the world. He had described the family to me as hard-working, educated, broken-down gentry. His feeling was that if, on returning to the mother country, he felt any repugnance arise as to living in it, he would return to Canada for life and death. This, and not any doubt about his wife, made him keep his secret. As to his name—George; you know Cecil was really his second name, he had been called by it from his

cradle, to distinguish him from his father, after whom he had been christened. Well, he got back. He walked through London dressed as a working-man, though of a respectable order. He had to go to his old tailor to be made fit to be seen—he has gossiped it all out with me by the hour. He was to meet his wife in Liverpool—a little more than a year ago, you know. He was to bring her and the boy to me at Brighton, and we were to arrange the future in conclave together. Oh, how fresh, and odd; how clever and amusing he used to be! Not till after his return from Liverpool, and his utter misery when the news of the wreck came to him——”

“The wreck!” exclaimed Lady Judith.

“Yes; the vessel was wrecked—lost—not till after that, long after that, when I was one day advising him to marry, did he tell me about himself and Letty——” And then again Mrs. Carteray broke down, and there was no pacifying her till Lady Judith said, “This poor girl, Mrs. Carteray, is in my dressing-room. I took such care of her as I could—let us have *her*, now.”

Mary’s story was soon told.

She appeared with the letter in her hand which she had received that morning. It explained and confirmed her story. She was as white as a lily, as stony as stone. It was painful and wonderful to see how she overcame herself, and trampled down her natural grief in the dust in order to make it immediately clear, and certain past all doubt and dispute, that she was his wedded wife, and the mother of his son. Everything gave way to it in a manner which they could not help admiring. Letty understood her thoroughly, and stood by her like a friend.

“And you are one of Geraldine Graham’s relatives?” said Mrs. Carteray.

“I am the only daughter of the Canadian Grahams.” Then came forth the letter which she had received in the morning. The name Cecil had gone by when he first came to them was Carter. She did not think he had ever expressly intended to change his name. He had never spoken of it. It was the pronunciation which they had believed to be right. He had spoken of Joe and Geraldine, and of Mrs. Ferris. When her father had told Mrs. Ferris of her marriage with George Carter from the old country, who seemed to know her, she had answered that, a youth of that name had once gone from near

her husband's farm, to seek his fortune, and that, no doubt, it must be that person. Her husband had been a friend of Mr. Maitland, the clergyman who had married them. Mr. Maitland had said he was 'all right,' and it was from Mr. Maitland that she had heard that morning.

The story of the voyage followed.

Her husband had told her to follow him. She was to write to him as George Carter, under cover to a ship-owner in Liverpool, fixing the time of her sailing, and naming the vessel. This she had done. She was to sail by the *Mary Jane*, and to be met in the Mersey by her husband. She was never pressed for money. But she always made the most of every penny. It was their way out there. She had felt now and then a little timid about being among strangers all across the sea. She could not account for it, but before paying all the money for her passage, she got very much averse to sailing in the vessel she had named. Also, she got by accident acquainted with a family who were to sail, a short time after the *Mary Jane* in a vessel well spoken of and called the *Swift*. They told her to come with them. There was a young mother, so very delicate as to make it doubtful whether she would get back alive, and the baby was the same age as her own. They offered to give her the money she had paid to secure her place in the other vessel, if she would consent to go with them, and help to take care of the sick woman's child. She liked them; they longed for her help; she was haunted by a strange dislike to the other vessel; so she forfeited the money, wrote to Liverpool to say what she had done, and sailed in the *Swift*.

On getting into the Mersey her husband did not meet her. She landed and went straight to the office, asking for George Carter. No such person had ever been there since a certain day, when the first letter had been delivered to him. No one knew anything about him. Her distress so much interested the person to whom she spoke, that his sympathy induced her to tell her story: then he told her that the *Mary Jane* had been wrecked—"The whole country is still talking of it," he said. "All lives—except those of three seamen—were lost. She was wrecked in a sudden storm, and within sight of land. No wonder your husband has never been here since receiving your letter. He thinks you are dead."

Mrs. Carteray had remained in Liverpool till she had seen Mrs. Baynard's advertisement in a London paper.

"All the time from then till now," she said, "I have been thinking if there was anything I could do. I had just made up my mind to tell Mrs. Baynard. Of course I had written to Canada, and to Mr. Maitland; when I thought my case hopeless I told all."

Then Mr. Maitland's letter was shown.

Cecil, too, had written to him, and told the whole story. He had sent the printed account of the wreck, and messages to her fathers and brothers. With the tenderest words he had written to his wife, and he had lamented her loss with the most touching expressions of regret.

It was this very letter, telling of the death of wife and child, which Mr. Maitland had sent back to her, and which she had that day received.

At the end of the letter, Cecil, speaking of his name being Carteray, and not Carter, regretted that he had ever yielded to the shortened pronunciation of his true patronymic—"but," he said, "I had gone through such a fierce trial of disappointment, and so suffered through the treatment of those who had called me by it, that the change was pleasant to me; and now, if I come back to live among you, as I may not improbably do, I will never be known by any other. I should like again to be treated as a son," he wrote, "by those dear hearts who gave me a wife."

No doubt rested on any one's mind. Mr. Maitland's note to Mary was very kind and sympathizing. He told her he had an address by which her husband could be found, and that he had written to him.

When the carriage came for Mrs. Carteray to go back to Marsland, a packet of letters came also. Among them was Mr. Maitland's to Cecil, directed to her care:

"DEAR SIR,—Your wife is in England. She was mercifully saved from the fate of the passengers in the Mary Jane, by sailing in the Swift. You will hear of her if you write to her under cover to the address inside. I have written by this ship, and sent her your letter. May you have many happy years with an accomplished and virtuous woman, who loves you, as we know! There is no more time than will suffice to, thus shortly, acknowledge yours. Your faithful friend,—FRANKLIN MAITLAND."

"My dear Letty," said Lady Judith, that afternoon, "you had better go back to Coombe. And I see Jane's pony

carriage coming to the house. Of course I shall see her alone. You can go back with her."

"Yes, mother." Then Letty, with the old still face, kissed Lady Judith, and said—"I would speak, if I had any words to tell it in."

"Would you, dear! Perhaps I can say it. It is a happiness to know that in all his actions Cecil was an honest-hearted, true man."

"Oh, yes."

"Also, you are not—and in fact never were, even in your imagination; nor ever could be—in love with another woman's husband."

"I believe that you have really said it," said Letty. "But I am happy!"

"Yes; why not? I never said that, because it is a matter of course. In the presence of his wife, what else could you be?"

"Oh, mother, how well you understand. It is, again, a great joy to know that he never said a word to me that I ought to wish he had not said."

"He was incapable of it. Sudden deaths shock one. I have, for his memory, only the most profound respect."

"Yes; as I said, other things are for his wife to feel. She looks such a pretty child. She is only just twenty. Great love and great grief are each the measure of the other; and both in their intensity are hers, I see."

A servant interrupted them. Some one wanted an audience—"It is Mrs. Ferris, my lady."

So Mrs. Ferris, leaning on her stout stick, stood before them, and they rose up to receive her. "Lady Judith, I don't ask any pardons. Mrs. Penwarne has just arrived, but I made bold and said I must see you first. I have been here for hours, with poor Mary; I am, more than anybody, like a real relation, you know. I told them to tell you I was here."

"I have been too much engaged to give you your welcome," said Lady Judith; "pray forgive me; I did not think you would feel on ceremony, at such a time, with Mrs. Cecil Carteray here. Of course you were the person with whom she would best like to speak."

"I thank you, my lady. But I want to say more. Will you send for some one to stand by her. Your ladyship's lawyer, Mr. Copley, perhaps. He, Mr. Cecil, her husband, like a wise man, before he left her, made his will. He

gave her a sealed copy of it. That seal has never been broken, and the will is safe in her box at Mrs. Baynard's. He told her that he did this, before his voyage, lest he should die before her or his boy. Had she not then best have Mr. Copley to stand by her, my lady?"

"Yes. You are quite right. I will write to Mr. Copley at once."

"And I would go and fetch her child to her," said Mrs. Ferris, "but here again I want your help. Will you lend me a servant for company? I am strong, but I want company. She will give me authority. I'd have your own maid, because we are friends, if you could spare her."

This too was immediately arranged. And then Lady Judith went to Mrs. Penwarne. "It is so good, and so like you, Jane. And I want to get Letty out of the house—I must stay while things are happening."

Then they talked together like sisters for a while. After which Letty was carried off, and spent a week at Coombe.

At the end of that time Lady Judith took her daughter to London.

"Our lives here are finished," she said to Colonel Penwarne. "I hope Alice and Hugo will not let Trederrick stay desolate. It is very good and right of Captain and Mrs. Goodman to take Mrs. Cecil Carteray as a guest into their house. I hear she is to stay six months. By that time her mind will be at rest, and in a fit state to take the advice of friends as to her own future, and her boy's. I have had a morning of farewell village visits. It has cost me tears."





CHAPTER XLVI.

AFTER A TIME.

This is the great elixir that turns gall
To wine and sweetness, poverty to wealth.

HENRY VAUGHAN.



WHAT is it that time will not do? It did a great deal for our friends; and to this history it brings a quick conclusion.

Three years after, Hugo and Alice, at a late breakfast in London, talked together. Hugo sat in Parliament for Newton.

"Belton's speech was sublime," he said. "There was a rush back into the House to hear him. He is a man who thoroughly understands his subjects. He is a splendid speaker. Never occupied with himself, but devoted to his subject. A thorough believer in his own political faith—which is his own, thought out, and read over—he is full of learning, he has the most miraculous memory, and he knocks truth out of evidence as nobody else can. I delight in Belton. He is a man to be proud of. If the country has any good in store for it, that good will be connected with that man's name."

"He has found his place," says Alice. "That is the best thing that can happen to a man. He cares for politics and his country."

"So do I," answers Hugo.

"Oh, of course. But I don't. Not in Lord Belton's way. I like a military depotism."

"Imagine my salaam," says Hugo. "I believe you."

"Letty was Lord Belton's first love, and she will be his last," observes Alice.

Hugo looks up with a smile; "And so I have been thinking. She is, of her kind, the most perfect of specimens."

She gets handsomer every year. They would be lost—she and her mother, at Trederrick, if they were really obliged to live there—and I am lost when I am anywhere else.”

“I think they would be lost without Sir James and Lady Luxton. Sophy makes a lovely young matron. Her boys are nearly as good as ours.”

“What an admission! But all you say is true. Lady Luxton is a great deal to Letty, I see. A necessity in her life, in fact. And a fine old friend like Sir James is quite a respectable possession. He is always glad to have Letty with his wife; and Lady Judith spares her to them without hesitation, and to no one else.”

“Everybody would not appreciate Letty. Her good looks are her least wonder. She is so educated; so fond of all—all——”

“All what?”

Alice is at a loss; “I don’t like to call her a learned lady; it is such an ugly, separating idea; but all that education means—I hope I am not talking nonsense—is so welcome to her. Everybody would not quite understand Letty who had not quite known her life. She never cared for silliness; and she has in her memory no stored-up trivialities. They were not in her life. But she has the capacity for being gay, and light-hearted, and even silly; only it is all so clever. She is more to be admired than loved, perhaps—loved with the love of lovers, I mean.”

“Oh! Ask Lord Belton. He understands her, and she admires him. I am sure of it. He is her match too; with that light, easy way of his, there is a marvellous depth of truth, thought, and sincerity, and the strength of an oak. He is a thousand times better than one of your iron-willed men; he is elastic, and will last longer, and will show no wear nor tear.”

“I wonder what Lord Dynham feels, and what her ladyship thinks?”

“Don’t you see how respectfully Lord Dynham bows to her. And my lady is quite nervously attentive—she sees the future mistress of Dynely in Letty’s face.”

“It would be a very perfect arrangement,” says Alice. “Nanny Teague always prophesies it, and my father and mother—supposing them to have any wishes beyond ourselves”—then they both laugh—“are quite earnest in their desires. I shall call on Lady Judith to-day.”

Alice called; and she saw Lady Judith, who admired

Alice and Hugo very much, and showed her approval unfailingly.

After a few words Lady Judith said, "You won't see Letty. She is with Lady Dynham. Lord Belton proposed and was accepted last night. Ten years ago I thought him insignificant, and Letty would not—never thought of letting herself—look at him. He has drunk of the 'great Elixir' since then."

"Oh I am very glad!"

"Well, so am I. Now please to tell me something of the old life. You must ask me to Trederick often when I have lost Letty. What about Mrs. Ferris? And is there another